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Religious Objects and Performance: Testing the Role of Materiality

by

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Doctor of Philosophy

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**Abstract:**

Department of Religious Studies

Doctor of Philosophy

**Religious Objects and Performance: Testing the Role of Materiality**

by Amy Renee Whitehead

This thesis addresses the problematic nature of religious materiality in Western discourses, illustrated by its typical relegation to being representational instead of sensual, embodied or tangible. Two ethnographic accounts highlight the prominent role that materiality plays in vernacular religious contexts in contemporary England and Spain. With a focus on offerings and gift giving, the practices and performances that take place in relation to statue forms of Our Lady of Avalon (the Glastonbury Goddess) in her temple, and the Virgin of Alcala de los Gazules, Andalusia, in her shrine, exemplify an aspect of the lived, everyday reality of religion. In these contexts, in tension with religious doctrine, the relationships that take place between statues and devotees show that instead of being mere objects, statues of the Goddess and Virgin are subjective, relational participants in ceremony, rites and ritual, and they play central roles in how human relationships with the divine are maintained and negotiated. Using the discourses of animism and fetishism to test the role of materiality, this thesis further considers how making offerings to statues exemplifies a form of Western animism (different from Tyloorean animism where alien spirits inhabit dead matter) where objects and subjects bring each other into co-inspired, co-relational being through encounters. Here, 'subjecthood' is achieved through relationships and relational encounters, and a multiplicity of ontological possibilities emerge which challenge commonly accepted modern dualisms, i.e. subject/object, mind/matter.

## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1, Introduction.....</b>	<b>1-25</b>
<i>Animism.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Fetish.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Terminology.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Vernacular/doctrinal.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Western.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Femininity.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>The Problem of Materiality.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>The Study of Religions.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Material Culture Studies.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Modernity.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Objects and Things.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Synopsis of Thesis.....</i>	<i>24</i>
 <b>Chapter 2, Literature Review.....</b>	 <b>26-73</b>
<b>2.1 Academic Discourses on Materiality.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>2.1a The Study of Religions.....</b>	<b>27</b>



<i>Relics and Value</i> .....	30
<i>Status and 'Idols'</i> .....	32
<i>Ritual and Performance</i> .....	34
2.1b Folklore Studies (and Altars).....	38
2.1c Material Culture Studies.....	41
2.2 Agency, Animism and Fetishism.....	54
<i>Agency</i> .....	56
<i>Animism</i> .....	60
<i>Fetish</i> .....	68
<i>Conclusion to Literature Review</i> .....	73
 <b>Chapter 3, Methodology</b> .....	 74-93
<i>Qualitative Research and Participant Observation</i> .....	75
<i>Guesthood as Methodological Approach</i> .....	78
<i>A method of 'things'</i> .....	80
<i>An Inductive Approach to Vernacular Religion</i> .....	83
<i>Informants and Interviews</i> .....	85
<i>Participating and Observing as a Guest Researcher</i> .....	89
<i>Eating and Drinking with Informants: Putting theories where the mouth is</i> .....	91

<b>Chapter 4, The Virgin of Alcala.....</b>	<b>94-145</b>
<i>The Virgin in Catholicism.....</i>	<i>94</i>
<i>Second Vatican Council.....</i>	<i>97</i>
<i>Andalusian Catholicism.....</i>	<i>98</i>
<i>The Village of Alcala.....</i>	<i>101</i>
<i>The Virgin and her Shrine.....</i>	<i>104</i>
<i>The Original Shrine.....</i>	<i>113</i>
<i>She/Her.....</i>	<i>124</i>
<i>Materiality and the Virgin of Alcala.....</i>	<i>125</i>
<i>Offerings (a testimony to healing).....</i>	<i>126</i>
<i>The Coronation.....</i>	<i>132</i>
<i>Display.....</i>	<i>134</i>
<i>Dressing the Virgin .....</i>	<i>136</i>
<i>The Parish Priest.....</i>	<i>136</i>
<i>The Camaristas.....</i>	<i>138</i>
<i>The Virgin in Procession.....</i>	<i>140</i>
<b>Interpretations of Observations.....</b>	<b>142</b>
<i>Similarities to the Hindu murti.....</i>	<i>144</i>
<i>Note about Mary and the Goddess.....</i>	<i>144</i>

<b>Chapter 5, The Glastonbury Goddess.....</b>	<b>146 - 191</b>
<i>Glastonbury.....</i>	<i>146</i>
<i>Landscape.....</i>	<i>148</i>
<i>The Glastonbury Goddess Religion.....</i>	<i>149</i>
<i>The Account.....</i>	<i>151</i>
<i>The Temple.....</i>	<i>153</i>
<i>The Temple Complex – how it works.....</i>	<i>156</i>
<i>Who is the Glastonbury Goddess? Who are the Nine Morgens?.....</i>	<i>158</i>
<i>The Glastonbury Goddess Wheel, Goddesses and Corresponding Materiality .....</i>	<i>160</i>
<i>Dressing the Temple.....</i>	<i>163</i>
<i>Creation of Goddess centered objects/materiality.....</i>	<i>166</i>
<i>Offerings.....</i>	<i>168</i>
<i>Healing and the Goddess.....</i>	<i>172</i>
<i>Daily life of the temple.....</i>	<i>175</i>
<i>The Goddess in Procession.....</i>	<i>177</i>
<i>Demise.....</i>	<i>183</i>
<i>The Goddess Hall .....</i>	<i>183</i>
<i>Participant Observation/My experience in ceremony.....</i>	<i>184</i>
<b>Interpretation of Observations.....</b>	<b>187</b>
<i>Polytheism or Monotheism?.....</i>	<i>187</i>

<i>Interpretation of Offerings</i> .....	190
--	-----

## **Chapter 6, Relationships, Relating, Relationality**.....192 - 228

<i>The Problem of Duality</i> .....	193
-------------------------------------	-----

<i>Relationality</i> .....	194
----------------------------	-----

<i>Statue persons</i> .....	205
-----------------------------	-----

<i>Physical characteristics</i> .....	209
---------------------------------------	-----

<i>Perspectives</i> .....	213
---------------------------	-----

<i>'To fetish'</i> .....	216
--------------------------	-----

<i>Performing Statues</i> .....	218
---------------------------------	-----

<i>Display and relational aesthetic</i> .....	220
---	-----

<i>Conclusion to Chapter 6</i> .....	228
--------------------------------------	-----

## **Chapter 7, Gift, Value and the Fetish: Testing the Roles of Offerings**.....229 - 255

<i>The Roles of Value</i> .....	229
---------------------------------	-----

<i>The roles of offerings</i> .....	236
-------------------------------------	-----

<i>Wood, silver, bone and stone</i> .....	239
---	-----

<i>Sentimental Value</i> .....	241
--------------------------------	-----

<i>Value, miracles and veneration</i> .....	245
---	-----

<i>Offerings and the fetish</i> .....	246
<i>Power Relations and Perspectives</i> .....	250
<i>Mediation</i> .....	253
<i>Conclusion to Chapter 7</i> .....	254
 <b>Conclusion</b> .....	 256 - 263
<i>Statues</i> .....	257
<i>Similarities/differences</i> .....	258
<i>Display</i> .....	259
<i>Offerings</i> .....	260
<i>Expanded on dualisms</i> .....	261
<i>Exaggerations</i> .....	262
 <b>Thesis Bibliography</b> .....	 264 - 276

## Table of Illustrations

Unless indicated otherwise, all photos taken by Amy Whitehead

### *Methodology*

#### **Figure:**

3.1 The <i>Santero</i> and Lucia.....	92
---------------------------------------	----

### *Virgin of Alcala, Chapter 4*

#### **Figures:**

4.1 Author and year unknown, The village of Alcala de los Gazules. La Sierra, Andalusia, Spain [Online Image] Available at: <a href="http://www.turismodelosgazules.com/Imagenes/Aleatorias/8.jpg">http://www.turismodelosgazules.com/Imagenes/Aleatorias/8.jpg</a> [Accessed 12 August 2011].....	102
4.2 Author and year unknown, The village of Alcala [Online Image] Available at: <a href="http://www.turismodelosgazules.com/Imagenes/Aleatorias/12.jpg">http://www.turismodelosgazules.com/Imagenes/Aleatorias/12.jpg</a> [Accessed 12 August 2011].....	103
4.3 Author and year unknown, Aerial view of the shrine and sanctuary of the Virgin of Alcala [Online Image] Available at: <a href="http://www.turismodelosgazules.com/Imagenes/Aleatorias/12.jpg">http://www.turismodelosgazules.com/Imagenes/Aleatorias/12.jpg</a> [Accessed 12 August 2011].....	107
4.4 The front entrance to the shrine, taken 10/07/11.....	108
4.5 The entrance to the shrine complex, taken 12/03/07.....	109
4.6 Inside the souvenir shop of the shrine, taken 12/03/07.....	110
4.7 The patio, taken 18/06/09.....	110
4.8 The entrance to the shrine part of the complex, taken 12/03/07.....	111

<b>4.9</b> The Virgin in her shrine, taken 12/03/07.....	112
<b>4.10</b> The long view of the shrine illustrating the ex votos and domed ceiling, taken 18/6/09....	113
<b>4.11</b> The original shrine around which the rest of the complex was built, taken 10/07/11.....	114
<b>4.12</b> The two doors either side of the altar, taken 18 <sup>o</sup> 6/09.....	115
<b>4.13</b> The chamber of the Virgin, taken 10/07/11.....	116
<b>4.14</b> The Virgin in her chamber, facing out into the shrine, taken 18 <sup>o</sup> 6/09.....	117
<b>4.15</b> The Virgin up close, taken 10/07/11.....	118
<b>4.16</b> The fertility Jesus, taken 12/3/07.....	120
<b>4.17</b> Author and year unknown, La Iglesia de la Victoria [Online image] Available at: <a href="http://www.turismodelosgazules.com/Imagenes/Aleatorias/8.jpg">http://www.turismodelosgazules.com/Imagenes/Aleatorias/8.jpg</a> [Accessed 12 August 2011].	122
<b>4.18</b> <i>Ex voto</i> depicting child's survival of a fall, giving thanks to the Virgin, taken 28/01/08...	127
<b>4.19</b> Contemporary ex voto in the shrine, dated 2002, taken 28/01/08.....	127
<b>4.20</b> <i>Ex voto</i> dated 1817, taken 28/01/08.....	128
<b>4.21</b> <i>Ex voto</i> depicting man surviving execution by Napoleon's army, 1815, taken 28/01/08...	128
<b>4.22</b> <i>Ex voto</i> depicting family pictures, taken 28/01/08.....	129
<b>4.23</b> Offerings of rings and jewellery on the Virgin's hand, taken 18 <sup>o</sup> 6/09.....	130
<b>4.24</b> Offering of a baby dummy on top of the fertility Jesus' glass case, taken 28/01/08.....	131
<b>4.25</b> <i>Ex votos</i> in the shrine, taken 10/07/11.....	131
<b>4.26</b> Illustration of the crown and gold framed face of the Virgin, [Online image] Available <a href="http://lasromerias.com/pages/andalucia/alcaladelosgazules">http://lasromerias.com/pages/andalucia/alcaladelosgazules</a> 06/09/07.....	133
<b>4.27</b> Devotee beneath the back of the Virgin's mantle, taken 12/03/07.....	134
<b>4.28</b> The making of food at the procession, taken 09/09/07.....	140



4.29 Annual procession or <i>romeria</i> of the Virgin around her territory, taken 09/09/07.....	141
--	-----

## *Glastonbury Goddess, Chapter 5*

### **Figures:**

5.1 Heijen, Nathascha. The Glastonbury Goddess Temple. Outside View [Online image] Available <a href="http://www.celtic-inspiration.com/magical-journeysavalon-cornwall-ireland/travel-albums.html">http://www.celtic-inspiration.com/magical-journeysavalon-cornwall-ireland/travel-albums.html</a> 29/08/07.....	154
5.2 Heijen, Nathascha. 'Samhain altar decoration in the Glastonbury Goddess Temple'. Wickerwork figure of the Goddess to the right. [Online image] Available <a href="http://www.celtic-inspiration.com/magical-journeysavalon-cornwall-ireland/travel-albums.html">http://www.celtic-inspiration.com/magical-journeysavalon-cornwall-ireland/travel-albums.html</a> 10/09/11.....	155
5.3 The Nine Morgens in the Goddess Temple [Online image] Available <a href="http://www.google.co.uk/imgres?q=the+nine+morgens+glastonbury&amp;um=1&amp;hl=en&amp;tbm=isch&amp;tbnid=vV586NLVW8VJpM:&amp;imgrefurl=http://family.webshots.com/photo">http://www.google.co.uk/imgres?q=the+nine+morgens+glastonbury&amp;um=1&amp;hl=en&amp;tbm=isch&amp;tbnid=vV586NLVW8VJpM:&amp;imgrefurl=http://family.webshots.com/photo</a> 10/09/11.....	160
5.4 Table of Goddess materiality and correspondences [Online graph] Available <a href="http://www.goddesstemple.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&amp;task=view&amp;id=36&amp;Itemid=53">http://www.goddesstemple.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&amp;task=view&amp;id=36&amp;Itemid=53</a> 12/05/07.....	161-162
5.5 Lady of Avalon and black cat in right hand corner, taken 10/07/10.....	167
5.6 Woman pinning a ribbon onto the Goddess figure after procession, taken 03/08/08.....	169
5.7 Yule offerings, taken 10/08/10.....	170
5.8 Temple at Lammas and offerings, taken 01/08/10.....	171
5.9 Cow skull offering, taken 01/08/10.....	172
5.10 Examples of banners and flags made by 'Stitchwitch' devotee, taken 03/08/08.....	173



<b>5.11</b>	<b>Woman lying in the centre of the Morgens in the Temple, taken 01/08/10.....</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>5.12</b>	<b>The Goddess and devotees in procession at Chilkwell Street, Glastonbury, taken 03/08/08.....</b>	<b>178</b>
<b>5.13</b>	<b>'Energy buffers' of the Goddess, taken 03/08/08.....</b>	<b>180</b>
<b>5.14</b>	<b>The 2010 Goddess Statue, taken 01/08/10.....</b>	<b>180</b>
<b>5.15</b>	<b>Devotees at Chalice Well pool with Goddess, taken 03/08/08.....</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>5.16</b>	<b>Devotee venerating altar in the White Spring during procession, taken 03/08/08.....</b>	<b>182</b>

## *Chapter 1*

### *Introduction*

The origins of this thesis lie in a day trip to the shrine of the Virgin de Alcala de los Gazules, Andalusia, Spain. On our yearly visit in the spring of 2007 to see my husband's family in Cadíz, my mother-in-law (who does not drive) asked if we could take her to see 'her Virgin'. I found to my surprise that my mother-in-law is a devotee to this particular Catholic statue of the Virgin Mary. Upon further enquiry, I found that her family is from Alcala and, like many other families at that time, had moved to the coastal city of Cadíz (which is roughly a 45 minute drive from the mountain village), in search of work in the 1950s. Many members of the family maintain ties with the village of Alcala, mainly through yearly visits to see the annual September procession and to visit/venerate the Virgin.

The year before this visit I had begun a PhD which was beginning to focus on religious materiality and museum display. When I entered the shrine on this day trip, I had already accumulated a foundational knowledge of 'material religion'. This set the stage for an overwhelming encounter. Upon entry to the shrine (and having come from a strict southern American Calvinist background), the 'stuff' I encountered made an impact. The shrine was filled with colorful *ex votos*, flowers, electric candles, wall paintings, cherubs, statues of saints, and much more. The smell was a mixture of frankincense and fresh flowers and the shrine, with its floors of black and white checked marble, was cool and dimly lit. Among all this 'religious materiality' I saw the statue of the Virgin, adorned in gold and silver, elevated high in her chamber, the focus of devotion. Then I watched as my mother-in-law clutched and kissed the

cross that hung around her neck, placed flowers at the altar far below the Virgin's feet, and then looked up at the statue in adoration. 'Now this', I thought, 'is interesting'.

What further spurred my interest that day was a lengthy and informative conversation with the *Santero*, the caretaker of the shrine. I told him that I was a student scholar in the study of religions and seeing my interest, he told me about the Virgin, her history, her *power*, how she is ritually bathed, how she appears in visions, the healings and other miracles she has done and how *extranjeros* (foreigners) from all over the world come to see her, including people who are not Catholic, and especially those wishing to have a child. At this point it dawned on me that the subject of 'religious materiality' went far beyond what I had first imagined, i.e. this statue was much more than an iconic representation of the divine.

Upon returning to England, I discussed this encounter enthusiastically with my supervisors and we agreed that this would make an interesting, accessible, case study for me. In thinking about another case study that could potentially parallel the materiality encountered in the shrine of the Virgin, I was told that I should consider the contemporary Pagan temple of the Goddess of Glastonbury. Living in close proximity to the town of Glastonbury, I visited the Goddess Temple. After encountering a temple steward and seeing statues of the Goddess, hearing testimony of 'her' power (mainly the Goddess's curative abilities), and seeing a multitude of creative, viewable expressions of Goddess devotion present in the temple, I agreed. Instead of examining religious objects as they appear in museums, I would study religious objects as they appear *in context*.

Although they form central parts of two distinct religiosities, statues of both the Virgin and Goddess have much in common. They are both 'representations' of the feminine divine who are

often engaged with, paradoxically, as powerful non representations. From the visible offerings left on their altars, at their feet, and in their temple and shrine, one can see that promises are made, and that statues are negotiated with. Housed in their temple and shrine, statues of the Virgin and Goddess are 'objects' of devotion who are engaged as if they are 'subjects' of devotion. Studied in this way, the remit of the thesis 'questions' became clear: relationships are what make these statues 'tick', i.e. relationships are the animating qualities of the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess.

In their contexts, statues of the Virgin and the Goddess are housed, bathed, given gifts, petitioned and cared for within highly sophisticated systems. These so called objects are capable of pushing materiality to its limits in terms of objects and their agency, or 'liveliness'. This leads to two further assertions which create the underpinnings of this thesis: first, this thesis introduces the concept of relationality. Dependent on relational engagement, objects and subjects (statues of the Virgin and the Goddess and their devotees) bring each other into co-relational *being* through encounters. Demonstrated through the giving of gifts to statues, relationality (discussed in theoretical Chapter 6) asserts that objects and subjects, spirit and matter, representation and embodiment, are fluid concepts as opposed to fixed theoretical boundaries. Relationships with the divine in statue form take place within a relational zone, the place where dualities are both engaged and expanded upon. Second, the transformative roles of objects found in the gifts given to the Virgin and the Goddess (exemplified through the fluid economies found in the temple and shrine) further enrich the concept of relationality and are demonstrative exaggerations of the ways in which Westerners value and approach material 'things' generally. This second assertion, discussed in Chapter 7, engages Mauss' (2006) idea of the gift, explores the materiality of offerings, and re-imagines the 'fetish' as a way in which to consider the *powerful* roles of

objects. After all, it is through the acts of the giving of gifts and entering into negotiations with these statues that we know we are dealing with a particular form of relational engagement that goes far beyond the 'social life of things' (Appadurai, 1986).

The theoretical implications of the thesis questions have led to an inevitable encounter with material culture studies. Religious objects such as offerings and statues of the Virgin and the Goddess readily test distinctions such as subject/object, transcendence/immanence, spirit/matter, mind/matter and nature/culture in ways that 'everyday things' such as cars, rugs and lamps cannot. They are set aside and marked for purposes that challenge Enlightenment rationality and certain modern dualities. Material culture studies are here informed by the study of religions because the religious objects found in the shrine of the Virgin and the Goddess Temple, with their transformative abilities, mysterious, spiritual value and otherworldly 'hybridity' (Mitchell, 2008) can be considered *exaggerations* of the roles that materiality play in Western culture generally. In the literature review (Chapter 2) I have surveyed anthropological and sociological theoretical approaches to materiality that underpin my contribution to an emerging debate about religious materiality. Indicating where the study of religions needs more considered engagement (which it sometimes receives), drawing on such theories offers both the study of religions and material culture studies different ways of considering statue veneration. This thesis does, however, remain firmly planted in the study of religions.

### *Animism*

Religious statues are generally relegated to being representations of the divine instead of tangible, embodied, powerful beings. Animism is therefore used to initiate this discussion concerning the relational engagement and roles that materiality play in the cases of the Virgin

and the Goddess. Through its many incarnations from Tylor (and indeed his predecessors) onwards, the term animism is capable of addressing questions relating to the problem of materiality and the roles of matter, i.e. matter versus spirit, *dead* objects versus *live* objects. As I will use it here, animism is a momentary, 'happening' that points toward ways of being and becoming in moments of active relating, i.e. it is through relationships with statues that so called objects of devotion become subjects of devotion and the potentiality emerges for devotees and statues to bring each other into co-relational being during the process. This type of animist relationality is built on Harvey's (2005b) 'new animism' where relational engagement indicates personhood and Scott's (2006: 61) idea that spontaneity is key to understanding how ontologies emerge between things/persons. That is the gap that exists between encountering and relating to a *thing*, or statue, intrude upon the quality of the momentary relationship in focus, whether that relationship is between a human person and a tree person, or a statue person and a tree person. The form of animism used in this thesis is not, however, completely different from Tylorean (1913 [1871]) animism where alien spirits inhabit *things of nature*. Depending on the particular mode of encounter, i.e. who is doing the encountering and what they 'bring' to that encounter in terms of epistemology, the Virgin and the Goddess are so relational that they are sometimes representations, sometimes 'inert matter' in which the divine takes up residence and animates a statue or a thing, and sometimes inherently powerful. Further, Viveiros de Castro's 'ontological perspectivism' (2000: 469) which asserts that reality can be apprehended from distinct corporeal points of view (here applied to statues), is also engaged as a way in which to pay to the potential roles of matter. These ideas challenge and expand upon the theoretical boundaries set by commonly accepted dualities (subject/object, spirit/matter), thus widening modern discourses to

include that which takes place relationally in encounters with statues of the Virgin and the Goddess.

### *Fetish*

This discussion of objects, the potential power in matter, representation and animism has further inspired re-interrogations into discourses surrounding the use of the term 'fetish'. The fetish is capable of critically advancing an argument about that which pertains to the relational, volatile, unpredictable territories of devotion where unknowable relationships, communications, mediations, and negotiations take place. Johnson says,

Using the inversion of the fetish to reveal the power of objects to elude classification and to examine the process of classifying fixation itself, there is no reason to assume that the fetish has outgrown its academic use- (or exchange-) value. Perhaps it merely requires a bit of dressing up once again to entice and seduce (2000: 248).

Indeed, as will be demonstrated in this thesis, many scholars from different disciplines are beginning to 'dress up' both animism and fetishism as remedial solutions to advance relational theoretical stances. Although the fetish is engaged throughout Chapters 6 and 7, it is done so as a sub-category of a more broad relational, animist discourse, i.e. fetishism is 'matter specific' animism because it is concerned primarily with the creativity and power of matter which influences how and why statues are given gifts, as well as the transformative roles of the gifts given. Complementing the relational status of animist relationality, fetishist relationality deals with that side of relationality where power is inherent in the objects engaged. Expanding on an examination of the mediating roles of offerings, including altar exchange, questions of value, and reciprocity, power relations that occur between statues and devotees are also addressed. Thus the

fetish re-imagined as a discursive tool finds its home in relationality, animism and statue veneration.

In terms of epistemology, the critical engagement of the terms animism and fetishism is, however, tricky. It must therefore be addressed for two reasons: first, because both terms have sordid pasts in the academy that were founded on abuses of power and ethnocentricity. Secondly, neither vernacular Catholics nor Goddess Pagans self-identify as animists or fetishists. I am not, however, suggesting that they do, or they should. This would be an imperialist claim equal to those who began unfairly labelling 'others' in such a way during trade and colonial encounters. The assertion here is that Goddess Pagans and vernacular Catholics have relationships with objects in shrine and temple settings that can be better understood by engaging animism and fetishism as critical terms. They are useful because they provide different ways of understanding the volatile nature of religion as it is practiced. Further, instead of using the terms animism and fetishism, I could have simply used 'relationality'. Yet animism and fetishism are culturally *ours*. As terms they were created in colonial and post-colonial eras as a way in which modern, civilised peoples could be distinguished from the non-civilised peoples being colonised. Thus employing animism and fetishism as critical terms means redressing an imbalance where 'others' have been unfairly marginalised from within a scholarly heritage for something that 'moderns' have always done.

### *Terminology*

With regards to terminology, discussing materiality has meant working with and challenging commonly accepted dualisms. Terms such as vernacular/official, subject/object, Western/non-Western, modern/pre-modern, Protestant/Catholic, objects/things, secular/sacred, have proven problematic through the writing of this thesis. Indicative of the problem of materiality (which is



dualistic in nature, i.e. what it is to be human is often defined in contrast to what it is to be an object), these ways of thinking about things, our humanness, and world around us, is reflected in a cultural arrangement of words. Primiano says

Questions need to be asked and then reasked about those basic theoretical perspectives, including the words, terms, and meanings which are freely taken from received scholarly traditions even before we have had our first interactions in the field (1995: 38).

Therefore several terms of engagement will necessarily be problematised throughout this introductory chapter. Intended to reflect the theoretical stance of this thesis, i.e. that relationality implies fluidity, many of these dualistic terms are engaged in order to both demonstrate and challenge their limitations. In other words, they must be acknowledged to be surpassed.

#### *Vernacular/doctrinal*

While material culture studies may have largely transcended the subject/object divide through its discussions of the politics of representation, these issues in the study of religions still requires some thought. The difference between vernacular and doctrinal religion is important to highlight because in the study of religions, they are often set on different trajectories, i.e. vernacular religion is always in dialogue with official and academic understandings. This is because the formal study of religions in Comparative Religion/History of Religions had a largely textual bias until the 1960's (Bell, 1998: 206). The significance of studying religions in the vernacular, or as it is 'done' forms part of an ongoing exploration in the field. Bowman says,

In order to comprehend religion in its broadest sense it is necessary to appreciate how official, folk, and individual ideas and behavior interact with each other (2004: 5).

Although vernacular and doctrinal religion are mutually influential, fluid, and interrelated, the term 'vernacular religion' is used to distinguish not only the difference between official text

based studies and that which happens among devotees/believers, but to draw attention to this thesis' focus, i.e. that which occurs 'outside' of official versions of religion is unpredictable, irrational, and emotionally imbued. It refers to location specific Catholicism and Goddess Paganism, and it also refers to the methodological approach outlined in methodology Chapter 3.

Primiano coined the term 'vernacular religion' as a remedial solution aimed at redressing 'a heritage of scholarly misrepresentation, in what I [Primiano] see as the necessary methodological reflexivity on the ethnographic process' (1995: 42). He describes it as 'personal' and 'private' and says, 'Vernacular religion is, by definition, religion as it is lived: as human beings encounter, understand, interpret, and practice it' (1995: 44). This needed advance was created to circumscribe the scholarly tendencies of anthropologists, historians, sociologists, folklorists and those in the study of religions who have 'consistently named religious people's beliefs in residualistic, derogatory ways as "folk," "unofficial," or "popular" religion, and have then juxtaposed these terms on a two-tiered model with "official religion" (1995: 38). Primiano adds that this juxtaposition implies 'that religion somewhere exists as a pure element which is in some way transformed, even contaminated, by its exposure to human communities' (1995: 39). It can also be suggested that 'high' religion regards vernacular or 'low' religion as invalid, and in some way inauthentic. This last refers to the elitism found in the text based study of religions and academic disciplines that consequently marginalizes its practitioners. According to Primiano, although several scholars in recent years have addressed the problematic nature of the two-tiered, dualistic model, no alternatives were being found, even though 'what scholars have referred to as "official" religion does not, in fact, exist' (1995: 45). Every religiosity, whether doctrinal or non-doctrinal, has no choice but to be vernacular in that it takes on the qualities and physical expressions of the places where they take seed and grow. In this vein, and contributing to

Primiano's discussion (1995) about official versus unofficial religion, in terms of materiality, Harvey says,

it can be hard to see veneration of masks or statues without being tempted by words such as "idolatry" or "fetishism" into thinking that materiality must be separated from true religion (2005a: 3).

So in terms of the 'private', intimate relationships that take place with materiality, i.e. the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess, involvement with vernacular, popular or folk religious practices entails theoretically 'getting a bit messy.' Hence, vernacular religion is not a refined dining experience with the House of Windsor; it is a hearty outdoor feast with old friends.

### *Western*

The word 'Western' requires prolematising, as the idea of a single, unified Western culture is flawed. There are several 'cultures' within Western culture. On a vernacular level, France does not share culture with Spain, no more than England shares culture with Australia or the United States. However, when considered on 'the whole', the countries that fall under 'Western culture' as an umbrella term have inherited certain characteristics that can be considered binding. For example, although these considerations are interwoven, they can be described as sharing intellectual (Enlightenment/modern rationality), philosophical (Cartesian, Platonic, Socratic), economic (capitalist, socialist), and religious traditions (Christendom, Protestantism, Catholicism). In terms of the Christian religion specifically, within its many forms in 'the West', it is often defined as transcendent, i.e. life is a temporary affair and this world must be transcended in order to obtain in a place in the afterlife. God exists out there in the ether and the material substance of this world must be surpassed, and 'officially', religious objects, i.e. images,

icons, paintings and statues are considered representations of the divine. As will be discussed further on, it is worth mentioning that the Occident shares the idea of religious 'representations' with many Eastern religious traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, a fact which will be addressed further on this chapter and in Chapter 4.

The ways in which the two vernacular religiosities discussed here can be either typical or exemplary of their overall religiosities is significant. Each case study typifies vernacular Catholicism and contemporary Goddess Paganism while having unique characteristics that make them stand out. There are, for example, shrines of the Virgin in many villages and cities in Andalusia. *La Señora de la Aelgria* in Cadíz, *La Virgen de la Regla* if Chipiona, *La Virgen de la Paz* of Medina Sidonia, *Nuestra Señora del Carmen*, *Patrona de San Fernando* and *La Virgen Del Rocia* in Huelva exist in local Catholic churches. The difference between the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala and others is that the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala is not a church, but a shrine, an *ermita*, specifically dedicated to *her*. Of the other *ermita* I did visit in Andalusia (i.e. *La Ermita de Santa Ana con la Virgen Niña* in Chiclana de la Fronterra), in comparison to the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala, *La Ermita de Santa Ana* is a blank canvas in that there is very little by way of material devotional display.

There are also other temples dedicated to the Goddess in England, such as those in Brighton and London (which opened after my research with the Glastonbury Goddess Temple was well advanced). Affiliated with the Glastonbury Goddess Temple, there are also two Goddess Temples in Australia, one in Belgium, Holland, Hungary, Sweden, and a further four in the United States. Both the Goddess Temple and the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala are exceptional in how they deal with, produce and engage materiality. For example, according to its founders, the Goddess Temple in Glastonbury is the first of its kind in the British Isles in 1,500 years. Because

the Glastonbury Goddess Temple is the 'original', it can be considered the inspirational 'mother temple' of the other temples. The priestesses and founders of these other temples have trained with the priestesses of the Glastonbury Goddess Temple, and the training helps in learning to create and use Goddess materiality in a way that is specific to the Glastonbury Goddess religiosity. The *ermita* of the Virgin of Alcala is the one of the largest and most popular in the region. Although the ways in which other Virgins are venerated, and made offerings to, are similar, the Virgin of Alcala is the only one that can be physically interacted with (discussed in detail in Chapter 4). Each religiosity is unique in that it is vernacular, i.e. it is shaped by its environment and the devotees responsible for maintaining its status. The shrine of the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess Temple are both typical *and* exemplary forms of their religiosities.

### *Femininity*

This thesis surveys the deep, personal, intimate relationships that take place between devotees and statues of the divine feminine as they take place in the vernacular compared with how they might be examined theologically and *theologically*, the latter defined by Mantin as the 'reflection on the nature of divinity within a female perspective' (2004:147). The significance of choosing two case studies which focused on the divine *feminine* in statue form was, it must be confessed, an afterthought. Once I began to understand the roles that the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess play to their devotees, I understood that their feminine roles deepen their relational statuses. Generally, femininity is characterized as synonymous with communication, relationships and relating, emotions, and a certain amount of hysteria, irrationality and emotional unpredictability. This makes relationships that devotees have with the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess 'incredible' to some extent, which further supports the claim that

'vernacular religion' is an important distinction to make. According to Christ, relationships are typically seen as weaknesses within dominant Western cultural discourses. Christ writes,

The notion that relationship is a weakness can be traced back to Plato and the traditional thinking that followed his lead. Besides saying that the Good cannot change, Plato also said that the Good is 'absolute, existing alone with itself, unique, eternal'. The idea of the Good or God as "existing alone" is contrary to the biblical picture of God involved with the world, creating, loving and judging it. So why did Plato and the philosophers and theologians who followed him assert that God exists alone? Because they viewed the risk involved in relationship as a potential liability (Christ, 2003: 71)

Christ's comment gets to the root of the problem and points to one of the reasons why case studies formed around two divine feminine statues/principles are poignant. The 'female form', sexuality, touch, the profane, the earth, and the body, are all things that must be transcended. Mind and idea take precedence over body and sensuality. How then can a statue be worthy of corporeally 'containing' the presence of the divine?

### *The Problem of Materiality*

A discussion concerning how the problem of materiality is characterized and understood is necessary to serve the theoretical implications of this thesis. Although they are mutually influential in terms of relevance to this thesis, the problem of materiality can be divided and considered in two veins: there is the academic problem of materiality in material cultural studies, and there is the academic problem of materiality and how it is understood in the study of religions. In relation to the roles that materiality play, one of the questions that concerns both of these disciplines is whether or not objects capable of their own agency apart from human

intentionality, i.e. where does the 'weight' of agency lie, with humans or with objects? Further, this leads to a brief exploration into the inherited ideas that shape the concept of modernity.

### *The Study of Religions*

The 'Problem of Materiality' is not new. Because the focus of this thesis is the study of religious objects, this discussion highlights the 'two great moments' which changed the courses of materiality's theological destinies: the iconoclast/iconodule debate and the Protestant Reformation, exemplified in issues surrounding transubstantiation. To begin with, the root of the problem can be identified as this: religion is often defined in terms of transcendence, representations, and/or metaphysics. This, from the outset, is dualistic. Manning and Meneley (2008), observe that

One of our many anthropological inheritances from the anti-idolatrous iconoclasm of the early Protestants is our general tendency to divide a category of 'religion' away from the general material muck of human existence. To speak of the materiality of religion seems oddly contradictory, even debased (Masuzawa 2000) (2008: 289).

Materiality is a problematic and 'messy' area of study because it confounds scholarship bound to Enlightenment binaries of mind and matter, rationality and irrationality, subject and object. In other words, materiality is only messy if approached with certain faulty assumptions that ignore the relational status of religious objects in Western countries such as England and Spain in preference for favouring theory over practice, or text/doctrine over relational engagement. Thus, instead of referring to the problem of materiality, we should more appropriately be referring to 'the problem of duality'. After all, what happens in religion as it is *lived*, i.e. practiced and

engaged by devotees/believers, tells another story that reflects the before mentioned combination of popular piety and doctrine.

According to Chidester (2000), early Christian encounters with icons, images and statues demonstrate that the divide between the material and the spiritual was very narrow, if existent at all. He writes,

Byzantine and medieval Christians did not operate within a strict conceptual dualism that separated spiritual and material realms. Rather, materiality itself – the bread and wine of the eucharist, the holy images of the church, and the sacred relics of the saints – contained and conveyed Christian spirituality (2000: 216)

This suggests that sophisticated ideas about the inter-related nature of the material and the spiritual exemplified in transubstantiation was 'normal' in early Christian understandings of religious objects. However, the council at Nicaea (754) (2000: 226) was formed as an iconoclastic council that accused iconodules of 'two blasphemies – they [images] limited God by confining divinity within material forms and they confused the human and divine by assuming that products of human art could hold and convey divinity'. Chidester writes,

According to the defenders of icons, the merger of spiritual and material in these holy images corresponded directly to the merger of divinity and humanity in the incarnation of Christ. "I do not draw an image of the immortal Godhead," John of Damascus observed, "but I paint the image of God who became visible in the flesh" (2000: 225-226).

This reflects the Catholic stance on their 'justification' for their uses of images and statues. Then, according to Muller (1954:16) image and statue use/veneration in Catholicism, despite the



Second Commandment which warns against making 'graven images' (and after many years of dispute and attacks instigated by iconoclasts) was finally re-instated in the year 843 C.E.

Later Protestant Reformers such as Luther, Zwingli and Calvin would, however, 'turn the theological tide' with regards to religious materiality and be heavily influential in their promotion of Christianity as a religion of 'hearing' instead of 'seeing'. Chidester says

Luther argued that Christian worship required no material support from things that could be seen. In 1522, for example, he insisted that proper worship needed no lights, candles, paintings, images, or altars (2000: 348),

He adds, 'As the Protestant Reformation developed, genuine Christian religion came to be defined by the reformers as an ongoing war against idols' (2000: 348). Chidester writes, 'Since the true God was purely spiritual, any material image used in worship, whether a painting, a statue, or a relic, became the locus for what Zwingli called 'strange gods'' (2000: 349). It was, however, Calvinism that emerged as the Protestant alternative to Catholicism (Chidester, 2000: 352-53). McDannell (1995) tells us that

[Calvin] maintained that humanity comes close to God only in our souls because God is a spirit. "Since God has no similarity to those shapes by means of which people attempt to represent him," he wrote in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, "then all attempts to depict him are an impudent affront...to his majesty and glory." Divinity, the wholly other and sacred, should not be brought into the profane world of bodies and art (1995: 5).

Although Calvin was familiar with John of Damascus's argument in the eighth century, i.e.

'Rather than worshipping an object as if it were a deity, Christians who venerated a relic or icon

were directing their devotion to the invisible reality that the material object represented', Calvin maintained that Christians who used images and statues were idolators who ultimately dishonoured God and deserved to be punished (Chidester, 2000: 352). The doctrine of transubstantiation was rejected by Reformers because it was thought to be misguided, erroneous and a sinful distraction from the one, true God, not because it was thought to be impossible.

Keith Thomas' work *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971) discusses the role that transubstantiation played for the lay people of medieval Catholic England and the effect that the Reformation had on the Mass. He tells us that 'The ritual [Mass] was said, in a notorious phrase, to work 'like a charm upon an adder'. In the actual miracle of transubstantiation the 'instrumental cause' was the formula of consecration' (1971: 36-37). According to Thomas, although theologians had made attempts to purify this doctrine, their means were too subtle to be understood by lay congregations. Thomas writes, 'What stood out was the magical notion that the mere pronouncement of words in a ritual manner could effect a change in the character of material objects' (1971: 36-37).

Thomas tells us that regardless of what the official Papacy, clergy, and other 'elites' were doing, lay persons had their own interpretation of the eucharist and the priests powerful role therein.

The priest was a vehicle for the administration of the Host whose transformative abilities made it such that 'it' would become the flesh and blood of Christ during the eucharist, be consumed, and still be able to be the transcendent Son of God simultaneously (1971: 36).

To Reformers, the ability to change the 'character of material objects' was no less than sorcery and magic. Thomas says

For if all conjurations and exorcisms were ineffective, then what was transubstantiation but a spurious piece of legerdemain – ‘the pretence of a power, plainly magical, of changing the elements in such a sort as all the magicians of Pharaoh could never do, or had the face to attempt the like, it being so beyond all credibility’. The Papists, wrote Calvin, ‘pretend there is a magical force in the sacraments, independent of efficacious faith’ (1971: 60).

However, the onslaught of the Protestant Reformation on the Catholic doctrine of the Mass changed the way in which the eucharist was to be understood and administered. With a view to stamping out any grounds for what they considered ‘ancient superstitions, Protestant reformers created simple commemorations to replace the sacrament where consecrated objects were transubstantiated (1971: 61). This understanding of transubstantiation has its roots in the early, Byzantine Christian debates. According to Miles (1995), ‘Iconoclasts and iconodules argued about images because they acknowledged their power, disagreeing only about the religious implications of that power’ (1995: 167).

In terms of the doctrine of transubstantiation and the Virgin Mary specifically, according to Warner, the Virgin Mary did not bear a particular significance in the theological issues being raised by Protestant reformers. This is because the Virgin Mary had no presence in the rites of the Eucharist. Warner tells us that, however, ‘her cult excited precisely those excesses of external idolatry, with their accompanying hollowness of the spirit, that horrified the men who pressed for reformation’ (1978: 296). Devotees transubstantiate the Virgin and the Goddess through devotion, veneration and relational engagement. This suggestion leads to another issue of importance that must be identified and defined in order for the thesis questions to be adequately

addressed. Embodiment and representation are two terms that require problematising.

Embodiment describes that which occurs when spirits/deities, or 'the sacred', are understood to 'take up residence' in statues and other religious objects. When statues embody the Goddess or the Virgin, the *presence* of those deities is found in matter. Representation, on the other hand, is used to signal the understanding that divine images/statues represent, or point toward the sacred, or a referent, i.e. a deity in its ethereal or transcendent state. In other words, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6, embodiment implies 'untranscended materiality' while representation signals 'transcended materiality'. As a relational stance might suggest, however, these terms are not conceptually independent but are fluid and dependent upon the politics of encounter.

Western religious systems are not, however, the only ones that have problems with materiality, or who view it as representational. Hindu and Buddhist viewpoints also understand the 'muck of human existence' as illusory stuff which must, eventually be transcended. This is illustrated in the Hindu concept of *maya*. Miller (2005) suggests that the problem of materiality initially arose historically in South Asia when wisdom began to be attributed 'to those who claim that materiality represents the merely apparent, behind which lies that which is real' (2005: 1). Yet, as Miller tells us, parallel to religious cosmologies are the concerns of the *everyday*, of accumulating and of commodities, materiality being the central point around which cultures, economies, and institutions revolve (2005: 2). Through an examination of the transformative roles of offerings found in the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala and the temple of the Glastonbury Goddess, this thesis puts this parallel existence of profane/everyday and sacred/religious objects to the test.

### *Material Culture Studies*

In terms of materiality generally, the problem of materiality is an ongoing one. From the way in which materiality was first characterized in anthropology as the 'museum object', to the dematerializing bias that took (and still takes) place, the nature of that which constitutes things as 'material' and 'how far they can go' in terms of agency and sociality remains under scrutiny. The problem is that most social theorists are happy to recognize the derived social lives of things instead of things as 'sacred', i.e. things play social roles as representations or commodities that arise between humans. This relegates the idea of 'subjecthood' to mere metaphor – a status which cannot help but to enforce the before mentioned dualisms and consequently negate the relational status of religious objects. Ingold writes

In the world of solid objects envisaged by material culture theorists, however, the flux of materials is stifled and stilled. In such a world, wherein all that is material is locked up in things, it would be impossible to breathe (2011: 28).

Pels (2008) theorizes as to why the disciplines of current theorists display a detachment with regards to materiality by exploring 'Victorian attitudes toward materialism'. He tells us that the religious dimensions present in how the history of materiality is understood is 'summarized in the concepts of prophecy and iconoclasm, will help to explain modern anthropology's dematerializing bias (Pels, 2008: 266).

Latour (2005) suggests that most academics and other privileged elites have been in cognitive denial of their dependence on 'things' for centuries. He says:

In their study, sociologists consider, for the most part, an object-less social world, even though in their daily routine they, like all of us, might be constantly puzzled by the constant companionship, the continuous intimacy, the inveterate contiguity, the passionate affairs, the convoluted attachments of primates with objects for the past one million years (2005: 82).

This is hard to dispute, yet anthropology has become more concerned with what it means to *relate*, and this is where this thesis, indeed the study of religions, benefits from material culture studies. Miller (2005), discusses how the ‘centrality’ of materiality to ‘the way we understand ourselves’ and how it is demonstrated in our continual return to it as a topic. He writes ‘Even within the most secular and self-consciously modern systems of belief the issue of materiality remains foundation to most people’s stance to the world’ (2005: 2). This also applies to religious materiality. It shapes the ways in which devotees perceive and therefore ‘do’ their religions.

### *Modernity*

‘Western cultural’ materiality is influenced by inherited notions of modernity as a cultural form of identification ‘characterized by the combination of modern science, a global capitalist economy, and the political power of the nation state’ (Curry, 1997: 22). Currently, according to Hornborg (2006),

Both [Ingold and Latour] are preoccupied with the dubious modern distinction between persons and objects and between Culture and Nature, both recognize that this distinction is paradoxically itself cultural (Hornborg, 2006: 23).

Part of the complexity of the theoretical problems encountered in this thesis has arisen from the fact that although social theorists such as Latour (1993) have argued that *We have never been*

*modern*, modernity has persisted in existing as a cultural self-identifying tool. Europeans, Euro-Americans and other Westerners generally consider themselves modern and this cannot be ignored. Although it might appear to be anti-modern that Virgin and the Goddess devotees treat, entreat, engage and relate to 'objects' as subjects, these practices are sophisticated religious practices that take place in 'modern' Western European countries such as England and Spain. Inherited ideas surrounding 'modernity' do not adequately describe the culture for which it is designed to fit any more than 'official religion' (Primiano, 1995: 38) adequately accounts for the personal, private beliefs and practices of individuals, or public and social vernacular practices either. Relationships are the binding forces that make such encounters 'work'. Hornborg (2006) says, as

Anthropologists have shown, many contemporary people who are intimately engaged in gaining their subsistence from local ecosystems continue to approach their non-human environments through what is now being called a 'relational' stance. Entities such as plants or even rocks may be approached as communicated subjects rather than the inert objects perceived by modernists (Hornborg, 2006: 22).

Relationality, as introduced previously, is the concept that is capable of ensuring that a fair and distributed importance is given to religious objects outside of modern, dualistic confines such as object and subject.

Thus it is not the intention of this thesis to engage with an ongoing polemic about modernity and take on the epic feat of disproving it. Latour (1993), and others have successfully questioned modernity and decided that it is seriously lacking as a culturally descriptive tool capable of accounting for that which takes place between here and there, subject and object, or mind and

matter. What this chapter contributes to the modernity debate is the suggestion animism and fetishism as critical discourses can aid in the *expansion* of inherited ideas about modernity so that it might include more relational possibilities. As Hornborg (2006: 22) has suggests, the 'relational stance' is now a common approach to the environment in anthropology. With the use of an animist (and fetishist) discourse, religious objects such as statues and offerings can also be included in this position. This means that the features of modernity that we are so familiar with do not need to be negated, but rather they must be enlarged to include that which takes place between and beyond dualistic constructs. Thus, incorporating and expanding upon the limitations of modernity's abstract dualisms helps to get the most out of relational theories, i.e. relationality sometimes *includes* modern dualisms. Hence, this thesis does not assert that dualisms do not exist, but it *does* assert that dualisms are not sufficient. Centuries' worth of culturally embedded dualities cannot be theoretically unraveled in a single thesis. These dualities can, however, be added to, and the whole discourse can be enlarged to include dualities.

### *Objects and Things*

Many of the scholars engaged within the literature review refer to objects as 'things'. Hence, it is important to first clarify the difference and use of two terms. Leach makes an attempt to define the difference between them. He says "Objects" are fitted into cultural contexts, while "things" are often discussed as the necessary material backdrop to the workings of society' (2007: 67). While not completely adequate as a definition, it has become apparent that 'things' is the term more commonly chosen by social theorists. As Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell, (eds.) (2007) write in the introduction to *Thinking Through Things*, 'The advantage of 'things' as a term is that, unlike 'objects', 'artifacts' and 'materiality', it carries minimal theoretical baggage' (2007: 5). This is supported by the use of 'things' by Latour and Weibel (eds) *Making Things Public*



(2004). Although 'objects' and 'things' can be used interchangeably – after all 'everyday' objects are as relational as religious objects, sometimes even *becoming* religious objects (especially in the cases of offerings) – the terms 'objects' and 'things' can be used here as a form of gentle differentiation between references to things that originate from exchange situations, i.e. commodities, and discussions of objects in religious contexts. This differentiation is necessary at points when discussing many of the debates surrounding materiality which, as mentioned before, often ignore the sacred. It is not the intention of this thesis to imply that 'everyday' objects and 'religious' objects should be separated and made into further dualities. As the discussion of sentimental objects in Chapter 7 reveals, everyday objects and religious objects are better understood as forming part of a continuum, a factor which plays key importance in understanding the transformative roles of objects.

### *Synopsis of the Thesis*

Following this introduction (Chapter 1), Chapter 2 introduces the literature upon which this thesis is based. Divided into two sections, it surveys, a) the works of scholars in the study of religions, folklorists, and those working within material culture studies so that the currency and significance of the materiality debate can be highlighted, and b) relevant works surrounding agency, animism, and fetishism. Chapter 3 addresses the methods used in conducting fieldwork, while Chapters 4 and 5 provide the ethnographic accounts of the Virgin of Alcala and Our Lady of Glastonbury that serve as contextual, supporting reference points to the following theoretical Chapters 6 and 7. Broadly, Chapter 6 addresses statue devotion through the concept of relationality and animism, while Chapter 7, aided by the discourse of the fetish, discusses the value and materiality of offerings and their various transformational and facilitating roles. The

conclusion gives a synopsis of that which has been encountered in the entirety of the thesis and points toward future possibilities in terms of furthering this thesis' research.

## Chapter 2

### *Literature Review*

This chapter is divided into two main sections which serve to situate *Religious Objects and Performance: Testing the Role of Materiality* within a lively and ongoing academic debate. The first section of this chapter, 2.1 surveys academic discourses on materiality while the second half, 2.2 addresses literature pertaining to objects and agency, animism and fetishism. Among those who examine materiality are social theorists, folklorists, archaeologists, anthropologists and scholars of the study of religions, as well as others such as material scientists. While the paths of these disciplines meet at points and are mutually influential, they often have different expected outcomes and are framed against different backdrops. Differences in approach are important because they highlight a significant problem that creates the underpinnings of this research: that the dominant academic discourses surrounding materiality have largely ignored the value of examining 'the sacred' and the materiality found in vernacular religion within Western European cultures. They have, instead, favored explorations of either 1) the social lives of 'everyday' things (where humans commoditize objects that are circulated and exchanged, and discuss them as representational means to the expected ends of social constructions and engagements), or 2) religious objects of the religious practices of the *Other*, i.e. other cultures, other identities, and the practices and beliefs of other *non-Westerners*.

As it will be demonstrated in this chapter, scholars in the study of religions are currently helping to address this gap by recognizing significant roles that religious materiality play 'officially' as well as in the 'ordinary' lives and religiosities of Western devotees and believers. Although it draws on the works of those examining material culture studies generally, this is

where *Religious Objects and Performance: Testing the Role of Materiality* makes its contribution, i.e. to the contemporary study of religions. The most significant works of the core theoretical literature relating to materiality that is introduced here are more fully engaged with, using case study findings as supporting material, in the theoretical chapters 6 and 7. Also, literature specific to Pagan and Catholic case studies is addressed in the relevant case study chapters.

## **2.1 Academic Discourses on Materiality**

### **2.1a The Study of Religions**

The study of materiality is relatively new to the discipline of religious studies although Durkheim's *Elementary Forms* (1915) paved the way for such explorations nearly a century ago. According to Bell, since before the 1960's, religious studies was largely a 'text', 'meaning' and 'belief' based discipline (1998: 206). Although 'day to day' religious action in Western and other discourses involve actively engaging materiality, Johnson writes, 'We [scholars of religion] have been less attentive...to the workings of objects in our own societies' (2000: 246). This can be attributed the divisions that separate spirit versus matter and/or the sacred and the profane that have typically influenced our understandings of our relationships with religious materiality. However, this, as Bell noted, has been changing for the last few decades (1998: 206). Now, ritual and ceremony are also thought to be essential modes of action to follow in understanding the 'workings' of everyday religion, and are coupled with and complementary to text based studies. This, according to Bell, comes after centuries (from the Enlightenment onwards) of theories being produced that acknowledge the cognitive aspects of religion (1998: 205). This part of the

literature review outlines some of the works done by scholars in the study of religions with regards to materiality.

Exemplifying the topical nature of the thesis, the journal *Material Religion: the journal of objects, art and belief* (Berg) examines and considers religion through the lenses of its material forms and it has been successful in reaching across a broad range of interdisciplinary fields and opening the spectrum for new approaches and theories to emerge that both include and go beyond ideas of representation, symbolism and meaning. *Material Religion* crosses boundaries not previously traversed by a journal and addresses issues of sacred space, place, time, ritual, performance, media, religious kitsch, veneration, decoration, viewable artefacts, display, statues, images, icons, relics, and much more, in a rich variety of religious, cultural and other contexts.

McDannell's book *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (1995) is vital in helping to understand the role that materiality plays in Christian religions. McDannell says, 'Unfortunately, the material dimension of Christianity has also been of marginal interest to scholars of religion (1995: 4). Helping to address this gap, this book offers a rich, comprehensive approach to the popular material forms found in Catholic and Protestant American Christianities. McDannell writes,

From the 1970's to the 1990's, significant theoretical and practical research has been directed toward understanding what it means to live in a world made up not only of ideas but of things. My explorations of material Christianity extends this research trend. It shares with historians, archeologists, folklorists, art and architecture specialists, and social scientists the goal of understanding American religious practice and thought through a close examination of the physical, sensual, corporeal, and phenomenal world (1995:2).

McDannell's exploration of Christianity's material forms involves addressing issues of touch, seeing, hearing and reading, piety, art, fashion, relationships, kitsch, families, women, children, Protestants, Marian devotion, souvenirs, decorations, meanings, the Bible, cemeteries, landscape, *ex votos*, shrines, garments, and consumerism.

Morgan (2005) uses different religious traditions to examine how 'the divine' is communicated with and 'seen' cross culturally. He suggests that visual culture serves as an approach that bridges belief and materiality. He proposes that images and statues mediate between belief and the material world. Morgan says that visual religion informs us as to the character of religion as it is lived in everyday life. He says,

People make their worlds from anything at hand, so if we wish to understand the architecture of their lives, we must consider everything they use to build it and keep it in working order (2008: 229).

According to Morgan, this mediating approach is useful when lived religion is not isolated from, but coupled with, religious doctrines and creeds. Further, Morgan (2008) suggests that scholars think about religious materiality and its relationships to words and actions. Here, argues Morgan, there will be no return to a purely object/artifact based model where modern classifications take precedence over other key aspects of more holistic engagements. He writes, 'The context for understanding things, in other words, is practice. But practice understood as the cultivation of embedded or embodied ways of knowing' (2008: 228). Reflecting the importance of the study of ritual and performance (discussed below), this 'pro-materiality' approach demonstrates the value of studying material religion and its vernacular uses, i.e. it is here where 'embodied ways of knowing' take place.

### *Relics and Value*

Although I do not engage relics in the ethnographic accounts of this thesis, a quick examination of 'relic' as a critical term in the study of religions is significant to this thesis because as objects, they have a unique stance in relation to agency, personhood, and value. Housed on, in, or even 'as' altars, the most holy centers of churches, objects became center points of directed emotion and faith whereby the sick could be cured, or where ceremonies and various rites were performed and legitimated. Chidester tells us that relics were not used necessarily for sanctifying an altar, but for other things such as oath swearing, healing rituals, and other votive acts that brought pilgrims great distances 'to be in the presence of a holy patron' (2000:218). Holy relics were made to serve as witnesses to those events and rites of passage of the living. Relics were so important in medieval Western European Christianity and that, according to Chidester, by the ninth century 'a church council in Carthage ruled that altars lacking relics had to be destroyed and re-consecrated with the physical remains of saints' (2000: 218). The Church used this value as a transformative aid. Value went from being simultaneously immanent and holy, to also being economic. Stallybrass (2000) says that as a 'state religion, Christianity developed its own powerful economics' through the use of the cult of relics

...that is, around a priceless/valueless fingernail a reliquary of gold and precious stones would be made; around the reliquary, a cathedral would be built; around the cathedral, an urban economy would develop; around that economy, new road systems would emerge that would pull large numbers of people and large amounts of money and goods along the pilgrimage routes of Europe. The priceless/valueless fingernail, provided it was not stolen or proved a forgery (and even if it was), produced economic value (Stallybrass, 2000: 3).

By 'value-less and priceless' Stallybrass is not saying that relics, for example, have no value, but that they have the same kind of value as a 'priceless' painting would have. However, the value discussed by Stallybrass both encompasses and goes beyond economic value and into the realms of unknowable value where objects are imbued with power or contain mystical or mysterious properties capable in aiding not only ultimately in salvation, but more immediately in the woes and trials brought on by worldly concerns. The 'priceless' relic imbued with other-worldly, curative, or protective value is transformed into something that can be of economic lure and value for the Church. The value of relics, then, is relationally capable of being religious, other-worldly, and/or economic simultaneously.

Patrick Geary (1986) also addresses relics in terms of value. He says that in medieval civilization, relics were circulated as commodities capable of renewing their own value during circumstances of removal or discovery. He argues that since relics were once part of humans, they can be considered in much the same way that a slave commodity is considered. Here the ideas of commodities and personhood are taken to new levels of understanding because relics are both persons and commodities. Due to the uniqueness of the bones of martyrs and saints and the power and spiritual value attributed to them, normative ideas of that which constitutes economic value is traversed, indeed, trampled upon. Here, 'the boundaries between object and subject are culturally induced and semipermeable' (Geary 1986:188).

Through comparing Christian and Buddhist relics, Schopen (1998) looks at how relics are housed, treated and related to. He tells us that 'The Protestant reformers were, for example, no friends of relics' (1998: 257). He says relics were perceived by Reformers to be, 'frivolities,' and 'absurdities', with many references being made to 'superstition', 'corrupt practice', and 'the



excessive zeal of rude and ignorant men or old women' (1998: 257). Yet his research has found that both Christians and Buddhists consider relics 'to be or contain the holy person: "He who lives is present in his relics," and "When relics are present the Buddha is present"'. He writes,

The centre [where the relics 'live'] is culturally alive, and it is permanently and architecturally located – it does not move. Its life is transmittable by contact, closeness, and shadow (1998: 266).

Schopen notes that all of this 'would seem to fly in the face of formal doctrine, both Buddhist and Christian' (1998: 266).

#### *Statues and 'Idols'*

From the contestability of the word 'idolatry' to the less contestable 'object use and engagement', speaking and writing about 'idols', 'objects' and 'things' is indicative of how academics in the study of religions are dealing with materiality's problematic nature. Whether through scrupulous avoidance or through direct engagement, the word 'idolatry' is problematic. Outside of theological literature, works engaging the term 'idolatry' in contemporary discourses are sparse. Gell (1998) writes,

The literature of idol-worship is, in the main, profoundly unsympathetic to this practice; it is almost as if learning to read and write disqualifies one from engaging in this practice with any enthusiasm. This rather supports the notion that there is a 'great divide' between the essentially non-sensuous mode of literate thinking and the sensuous, participatory mode of pre-literate thinking (115).

He goes on to say that there has been a reaction against this kind of thinking in recent years, and now many 'educated' people are seen to venerate idols made of wood and stone (1998: 115). Gell is, however, referring to statues found in Hinduism. When he refers to European statues and images, they are 'art indexes', for Gell does not see much difference in the way that appreciators of art pay homage to statues and images to the way that religious devotees do.

The animation of religious statues occurs in many different cultures. Examining the ways in which Catholic statues perform for their devotees in Malta, Mitchell (2009) proposes that Catholicism is a material religion of local and universal beliefs and that statues and objects have a combination of 'presence' and power. Mitchell says that saints are 'hybrids: part historical, part mythological; part everyday, part transcendental; part natural, part supernatural. Statues of saints both communicate and resolve this duality (Mitchell, 2009: 265). Further, tells us that statues are dangerous and talismanic as well as capable of containing the presence of the saint, i.e. he is implying that statues have the power to act of their own accord. He writes

As James has argued of Byzantine Constantinople, "statues were perceived on both the popular and the intellectual level as animated, dangerous and talismanic" (James 1996: 15)—animated by the presence of the saint; dangerous because they had the power to protect themselves against attack, as in the image of the Virgin that retaliated against a man who threw a stone at her by crushing his head; and talismanic because they also had the power to protect those devoted to them (2009: 265-266).

This work is valuable in that it recognizes the agency and power attributed to statues as both universal and specific to locale and helps in understanding the roles that the statues discussed in this thesis play within their religiosities, particularly within Catholicism. Schieffelin (2005) says that performance creates presences. He writes,

Performances, whether ritual or dramatic, create and make present realities vivid enough to beguile, amuse or terrify. And through these presences, they alter moods, social relations, bodily dispositions and states of mind (Schieffelin, 2005: 125).

If performance generates presences, then presence, as discussed by Mitchell about the statue of the Virgin in Malta (2009), must also inspire and inform rituals and other performances.

### *Ritual and Performance*

Ritual and performance, two critical terms in the study of religions, have proven problematic to contemporary scholars as they both point toward and address the problematic nature of materiality. Ritual and Performance are relevant to my approach to materiality because they focus on relating to the divine through corporeal experiences (contrasted with doctrinal, or text based interpretations of what experience 'should' be). The scholars discussed in this section aid in my examination of statue devotion/veneration because they treat religious practices and performances as dynamic and fully relational. Beginning with the term 'ritual', Smith tells us that, 'Ritual is, first and foremost, a mode of paying attention' (2005: 33). Protestantism's insistence that ritual is empty (Smith, 2005: 32), or an active representational masking instead of an embodied devotion, reflects the modern and Protestant fear of the potential significances of matter. This can be identified in the academy and in the discomfort and uneasiness scholars feel when observing the physical performances of touching and kissing relics and statues (as suggested by Stallybrass, 2000). Ritual Studies scholar Bell (1992) says

Theoretical descriptions of ritual generally regard it as action and thus automatically distinguish it from the conceptual aspects of religion, such as beliefs, symbols, and myths (1992: 19).

Further,

In arguing how categories of ritual practice have been used to define objects and methods of theoretical practice, I raise questions about the dynamics of theoretical practice as such (1992: 5).

This emphasis on concept and theoretical description takes attention away from the tools often used in ritual performances. In Western cultural discourses, modes of being and doing often conflict with ways of believing, just as materiality forms the world around us but generally goes unnoticed in terms of conscious recognition. For example, 'ritual and belief' according to Harvey (2005a), 'are often contrasted in religions and wider cultures as well as in academic discourse and theory'. He continues:

The contrast seems simple: doing something is not the same as thinking it. Having ideas is not the same as acting on them. The arrangement of ceremonies or of valued objects is not the same as their meanings (2005a:1).

However, as Harvey tells us, these distinctions have been oversimplified. Ritual, materiality and belief are intimately linked and are mutually influential in a myriad of complex ways (2005a: 2). Ritual is performed by actors in relational encounters with one another and for/with objects, things and space around them. Smith (2005) says 'A ritual object or action becomes sacred by having attention focused on it in a highly marked way' (33). Further, sacrality is situational and, as Smith says, it is 'above all, a category of emplacement' (2005: 33). Ritual 'things' stand in contrast to the objects discussed by Miller (2005) (addressed further on) that are important because they blend so readily into our lives that they go unnoticed (2005: 3).

As previously mentioned, from the 1960's onwards, scholars have become more concerned with the performative action of religion, or religious performance. The adoption of

'performance' as a critical term reflects those changes and has aided in widening the methodological approaches to religious studies (Bell, 1998: 206). Bell marks the progression of the terms that lead up to 'performance' by placing 'liturgy' first, then 'worship', then 'ritual'. She expounds on the notion that all of these performative actions reflect self-conscious devotion that takes place in active, religious practices. Bell writes,

With this repertoire of meanings [theatrical performances, or musical recitals, for example], religious studies uses the language of performance to stress the execution of a pre existing script for activity (as in conducting a traditional church service) or the explicitly unscripted dimensions of an activity in process (as in the spirit or quality of service).

She explains:

Overall, usage remains diverse and ambiguous: To speak of ritual performances or the performance of worship can imply a tradition-oriented execution of established codes of behavior, an action-oriented perspective focused on the doing itself, or both (1998: 205-6).

Yet with each generation of both students and practitioners come different understandings and relationships, which keep performances, even if marginally, open to change and renewal. This, according to Bell, brings into question how the scholar's own position plays a role in the performance approach 'articulating postmodernist concerns for reflexivity, critiquing claims to simple objectivity, and sometimes systematically deconstructing the whole scholarly stance' (1998: 210). Like ritual, performance in religion is embodied action that illustrates continued,

creative, cultural renewals where humans are actors in relational encounters with each other and with materiality. 'Performance' recognizes tradition, yet allows for the creative adaptations that occur when new actors and/or generations emerge. It can be suggested that performance is the fuel that keeps religion *in motion*, and its ambiguity means that it can be applied to a wide reaching number of activities that involve humans, other than humans, and combinations of both. Performance is relationality embodied and acted out.

Grimes (2002) also discusses performance in terms of it being intimately entangled with religion. He argues that performance, or action – right action – when 'deeply' embodied are currency and that they have the ability to 'save the world'. He refers to performances as currency 'only if they are deep-world performances, and they are deep-world performances only if their metaphors are embodied – radically, to the bone, to the quick' (2002: 153). To explain, Grimes says

To dance the peacock or play the snake, you must become the peacock, be the snake. A deep-world performance is one in which performers are so drastically identified with the objects of their performance that there is no difference even though everybody knows animals and humans are different (2002: 53).

If we follow Grime's argument, then deeply embodied performances of devotion serve as forms of thoughtful, sincere currency that has the ability to 'blur' the lines between that which constitutes subjects and objects. Performances are, after all, volatile. They point toward the verb-like, performative nature of the reality of religion as it is *done*.

## 2.1b Folklore Studies (and Altars)

Complementary to (and not separate from) anthropology and the study of religions, folklore studies draw attention to cultural expressions such as art, communication and oral tradition. Klein (2001) tells us that folklore ‘denotes oral narration, rituals, crafts, and other forms of vernacular expressive culture’, ‘names an academic discipline devoted to the study of such phenomena’, and that ‘in everyday usage, folklore sometimes describes colorful ‘folkloric’ phenomena linked to the music, tourist, and fashion industries’ (2001: 5711). As with anthropology, folklore studies acknowledge objects and their meanings in a wide range of cultural contexts. It can be suggested the folklore studies is ‘grassroots anthropology’. As part of their field of investigation, folklorists have been examining vernacular religious materiality since the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Exemplifying this, the journal *Folk-lore* was first established in Britain in 1878 followed by *The Journal for American Folklore* (American Folklore Society) in 1888. During this era, the study of religions was more concerned with the science of religion and transcendence than objects ‘on the ground’. Although this has now changed, i.e. scholars in the study of religions are focusing more on the material dimensions of religion, folklore as a discipline offers much to the study of religions.

Turner’s *Beautiful Necessity* (1999), Magliocco’s work *Neo-Pagan Sacred Art and Altars: Making Things Whole* (2001), and Thompson’s work *Face of the Gods: The Artists and Their Altars* (1995), discuss the relationships that people have with materiality, the actual materiality used on altars, and the creativity that goes into putting them together. These scholars do, however, discuss objects largely in terms of ‘symbols’, ‘meanings’, ‘metaphor, and ‘representations’ the choppy dualistic waters around which this work is attempting to navigate.

Turner's (1999) work is a visually stimulating book that displays images of women's personal altars in their homes. The altars illustrated in the book are from many different religiosities, such as Goddess, Celtic, Catholic, Afro-Caribbean, Voodoo, Greek Orthodox, Hindu, and more. Turner discusses the creativity involved in making personal altars, along with other altar-related issues such as embodiment, altar economies, ritual, healing, aesthetic value, and the power of the relationships that their creators have with them. Turner says,

The home altar exists at a point of intersection between art and religion where the sacred is apprehended in a woman's *imagined* relationship with the Divine (1999: 27).

Tight parallels can be drawn between Turner's work and my own which also emphasizes the importance of relationship, relational encounters with statues and objects, and femininity, yet the emphasis of my work exists within public, not private, spaces, and within different theoretical parameters that engage current theorists within the materiality debate. Throughout *Beautiful Necessity*, Turner interchangeably treats icons and images as symbolic, representational, and embodied; yet in her chapter, 'The Power of Images: Embodiment and identification', she writes

Sacred icons are unique in their ability to mediate the difference between the human and the Divine by proposing a similarity between the human body and the divine body. This has resulted in a dilemma, the problem of idolatry, which has confounded religious philosophy for centuries. Can a material image be said to come alive with the potency of divine power? That women have answered this question affirmatively is at the heart of the home altar (1999: 113).



Turner nearly appears convinced by the end of this chapter that 'When a woman fully turns to beloved sacred images, she crosses a space between representation and reality' (1999: 127). Maintaining a scholarly distance, she never states directly that, 'images of the divine are not representational, but immanent'.

Similar to Turner, Magliocco (2001) discusses the details of Neo-Pagan Altars and the artistic processes by which they are created and made sacred. Magliocco's book contains descriptions of the materiality used to create Pagan altars which are useful in understanding the processes by which creative 'new' religiosities are expressed. She tells us that Pagan altars are not fixed, that they are ephemeral pieces of sacred art. She writes, 'Since Pagans believe deity is immanent, an altar can be made anywhere – on the ground, in a natural place, at the base of a tree, even in an office or hotel room'. She then says,

The altar is an important focal point for energy. It holds ritual tools, such as salt, water, candles, and representations of deities... (2001: 9).

This last bears a commonly reproduced contradiction that I have uncovered on countless occasions during the course of this work: when discussing Western religious materiality, figures of the divine are discussed in terms of representation, while other types of 'unknowable' relationships are indicated simultaneously but not addressed.

Thompson (1995) 'presented approximately eighteen altars composed of more than 100 African and African-American artworks' in an exhibition that was taken around several museums in the United States and in Europe. Thompson displayed the Yoruba Gods who are recognizable on both sides of the Atlantic. For example, Altars were made to Oju Oxala: Afro-

Brazilian Altar to the Yoruba Creator God, Obatala's Warriors, a Tree Altar was made to the Ancestors, Flag Altars were also made to the Ancestors, and an Altar was made to the Spirit Sarabanda Rompe Monte. According to Thompson, 'Afro-Atlantic altars often form a locus of healing and moral reckoning' (1995: 59). Arguably, the altars displayed in Thompson's work can be understood to invoke the deities and ancestors they are 'representing' in the museum context which means that the Gods took up residence at their Altars and inside the museums where they were being displayed. The exhibitions challenged notions of that which makes an art exhibition and explored 'the contested borders between authenticity and inauthenticity, art and belief' (1995: 50). These boundaries were explored in how the identities of the objects displayed were transformative. Many of the altar objects on display were religious objects, but according to Thompson, they took on a 'second life' when they became museum objects. Others were museum objects which, in turn, became religious objects (1995: 50).

### **2.1c Material Culture Studies**

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, material culture studies have largely overlooked religious materiality in many Western discourses. As one of the aims of this thesis is to demonstrate how material culture studies can inform the study of religions, and to situate this thesis among the relevant debates with regards to objects and agency, some of the more significant moments in the biography of material culture studies must be addressed. Both Buchli (2007) and Hicks (2007) follow the historical and contemporary changes that have taken place in material culture studies. Buchli (2007), in the introduction to *The Material Culture Reader*, summarizes the history of material culture studies, saying

Material culture as we understand it is a direct consequence of the collecting traditions of the nineteenth century, liberal Enlightenment era notions of universality, colonial expansion, industrialization and the birth of consumerism (2007: 12).

This brief historical summary is expanded upon in great detail by Hicks (2010) in *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*. He introduces his chapter 'The Material-Cultural Turn', saying 'This chapter explores how the ideas of "material culture" and 'material culture studies' are themselves artifacts of particular disciplinary conceptions of 'the social' (Hicks, 2010: 27). Hick's chapter is, however, worth further engagement. Much of the information he provides with regards to the cultural roles of objects as they have been (and are being) debated by the more influential scholars in the field serves as a foundation to the concerns of this thesis.

Starting from the 'Museum Period', Hicks 'excavates' material culture studies by taking the reader through an historical journey through its many phases of development to its contemporary manifestation. He tells us that it was during the 'Museum Period' which took place in 'the last third of the nineteenth century from earlier Western colonial and antiquarian collecting practices', archaeology and anthropology studied human technology (Hicks, 2010: 30). Compared with 'Earlier European collections of objects' which 'sought to gather the curiosities of the world, both natural and manmade, in the cabinets of the curious' (Buchli, 2007: 4), the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford presented artifacts in a typological, linear model that systematically and scientifically documented the evolution of technological and social change (Hicks, 2010: 31). Hicks says, 'The museum made a connection between human technology and Edward Tylor's notion of 'culture', as set out in his book *Primitive Culture* (1871)' (2010: 31). Tylor saw the potential inherent in the study of objects ('object-lessons') in that he saw 'the curation and study of objects: as not only documenting the past or understanding the present, but also

envisioning the future' (Hicks, 2010: 34). This 'connection' between 'human technology' and Tylor's notion of 'culture' ultimately paved the way to a more humanistic side to material culture studies, but at the price of a scholarly 'dematerialization' of anthropology. In reference to this, Pels writes

The subsumption of the "fetish" under "animism" in the work of Edward Tylor can be read as marking a certain transcendence of the sociocultural over the material (Pels, 1998: 94), so that, despite the evolutionists' heavy focus on the museum object, their "dematerializing" thought can also be seen as having prepared the way for the marginalization of material culture studies in early twentieth-century anthropology (cf. Stocking 1985: 114; see below) (Pels, 2008: 266).

According to Buchli (2007),

Transitional figures such as Boas became disillusioned with museum based work, becoming more interested instead in the social process which structured material culture (Boas 1907). The end result was an emphasis on kinship and social structure, the cornerstones of twentieth century social anthropology (Buchli, 2007: 7).

Mauss' *The Gift* in 1923 (2006 [1990]) reflected this interest in 'the social' over 'the material' by examining the processes by which gifts and things were exchanged amongst the peoples of Polynesia. He applied these engagements, expectations, social relationships, agency, etc. to his own culture in an attempt to better understand the deeper realities of the social implications occurring when things, or 'gifts' are given and/or exchanged/reciprocated. According to Douglas (2006), the significance of Mauss' gift was so revolutionary and significant to understanding social processes that anthropology would never be the same again (2006: xix). Mauss analyzed

the social rules, coupled with the unknown factor of *Hau*. Although gift exchange appears to be free and disinterested, it is, in fact, loaded with an array of meanings, forces (*Hau*), contracts, and expectations that point toward relations and kinship issues.

Although many of the foundational scholars upon which much of current material culture studies are based are not reviewed here, they must at least be acknowledged. Levi-Strauss and his study of 'Saussurean linguistics (de Saussure 1959 [1916])' primitive art, and social culture, Geertz's (1973) 'focus upon interpretation and the study of meaning and social practice' which was 'paralleled by new Durkheimian accounts of the anthropology of ritual performance and 'symbolic action'' (Turner 1975: 159; see Turner 1967) (Hicks, 2010: 44), and a Marxist study of material culture are relevant to this thesis because they 'saw the re-evaluation of the material within symbolic systems' (Buchli, 2007: 10). This was the start of the 'Material Cultural Turn' as it is recognized today, which

problematized the study of the socio-cultural and the material in isolation from each other. Its solution was to document how they were 'related', so as 'to transcend subject-object dualities' (Miller and Tilley 1996: 7) created by the modern world. Material culture studies documented, to use the standard parlance, 'relational' processes (Miller 2007: 25): that is, it was concerned with the relationships between objects and people (Hicks, 2010: 60).

In the 1980's this 'turn' in material culture studies had several different 'trajectories'. It came from the fields of, 'ethnoarchaeology', 'symbolic and structural archaeology' and 'economic anthropology' (Hicks, 2010: 61) out which Miller's work *Material Culture and Mass*

*Consumption* (1987) originated. Miller's 'material culture studies' became 'a social anthropology of consumption' (Hicks, 2010: 61). It

developed through the structuralist and semiotic treatment by Roland Barthes (1972 [1957], 1977) and Jean Baudrillard (1983), and especially the anthropological consumption studies developed in Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood's *The World of Goods* (1979)' (Hicks, 2010: 60).

In this last, Douglas (1979) changes the suppositions surrounding 'goods' by suggesting that they be understood 'for making visible and stable the categories of culture' (1996 [1979]: 38). Then,

Forget that commodities are good for eating, clothing, and shelter; forget their usefulness and try instead the idea that commodities are good for thinking; treat them as a nonverbal medium for the human creative faculty (1996 [1979]: 40).

Hicks tells us that 'These scholars, particularly Douglas and Miller, helped initiate the 'cultural turn' in British archaeology and social anthropology during the 1980s and 1990s' (Hicks, 2010: 60).

Douglas' work was 'paralleled by that of other anthropologist such as Arjun Appadurai and Pierre Bourdieu' (Buchli, 2007: 10). In the introduction to *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective*, Appadurai argues that 'commodities, like persons, have social lives' (1986: 3). This opening statement immediately disarms the secularist assumption that commodities are only capable of having exchange, or economic, value. He begins by saying that 'Commodities can provisionally be defined as objects of economic value', then asserts that objects are political and continually breach existing frameworks of prices and other forms of negotiation through their insistence on not representing the same values among those agents

involved in their exchange. This is due to economic value being prescribed in accordance with how they are judged by those subjects and agents responsible for their exchange and circulation (1986:3). Appadurai suggests that we look away from the theoretical issues that lead us to see things as representations formed from human transactions and imposed meanings and look toward a social discourse of things where they are enlivened by their contexts, i.e. their uses and trajectories. This allows things a sociability where their status is negotiable, an idea that goes beyond the dualist binary model proposed by Appadurai's anthropological predecessors. However, although his theory does not acknowledge (nor does it attempt to) the full relational capacity of objects across a broader spectrum, this approach challenges the subject/object divide. He says,

Ever since Marx and the early political economists, there has not been much mystery about the relationship between politics and production. We are now in a better position to demystify the demand side of economic life (1986: 58).

The economics (social, 'mysterious' and physical) of gift exchange are exemplary of how objects have (or are permitted to have) operative agencies in anthropological discourses.

Locating the 'gift' theme at the 'centre of current discussions of deconstruction, gender, ethics, philosophy, anthropology, and economics', Schrift (1997: 3) discusses the 'gift related' writings of more recent scholars such as Sahlins, Bourdieu, and Strathern. As discussed previously, Mauss pioneered attempts at understanding gift exchange, or the exchange of objects, outside the realm of Western normative economic discourses. However, Harvey (2005b) says that Europeans misunderstood the fact that the Maori ideas of the social are different from their own (2005b: 13). He writes,

In short, *hau* fits Mauss' gift theory much better when it is understood not as a mystical force but as a social one, and this can only be so if the category of persons is understood to apply not only to humans (2005b: 14).

Bourdieu also addresses the practices involved in gift exchange and argues that ultimately, the gift is political (1997:204). He raises important issues with regard to how materiality is circulated and exchanged through his ideas that the distinguishing lines between what is economic and non-economic are blurred, and that objects are 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu, 1997: 215). Bourdieu says that the gift

makes room for time, or more precisely, for the time lag between gift and counter-gift, and for uncertainty; it brings in a theory of the agent and of action that makes the dispositions constituting the *habitus*, rather than consciousness or intention, the basis of practices; and it relates gift exchange to a quite specific logic, that of the economy of symbolic goods and the specific belief (*illusio*) that underlies it (1997: 231).

Bourdieu argues that his theory addresses a theoretical gap not recognized by Levi-Strauss and Mauss. This gap is the space that exists when a gift is en route between giver and recipient. It is this relational zone where transformations take place. This idea furthers his argument proposing that by breaking away from the nature of economics, we can consider the durable relationships that come from gift exchange (1997: 237). The relationships that are created during moments of exchange are at the foundation of symbolic capital. Schrift says, 'Bourdieu develops the notion of 'symbolic capital' as capital whose social value is recognized by virtue of its material value having been misrecognized' (1997: 14). This theory of agency complements the works of Douglas, Mauss and Appadurai.



Bourdieu's (1977) term *habitus* 'is a very old one, of Aristotelian and scholastic origins, but Bourdieu uses it in a distinctive and quite specific way' (2008: 12). Employing the term *habitus* to identify how and where systems of classification emerge, Bourdieu tells us that *habitus* is produced through the 'principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations' which are 'collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor' (1977: 72). In other words, *habitus* is set in motion by unconscious, collective, culturally embedded ways of producing information and attitudes about the world which is inherited generation to generation. However, *habitus* is not a fixed condition, but adapts as culture changes. Bourdieu calls it the 'installed generative principle of regulated improvisations' (1977: 78). Bourdieu says that actors, or 'subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know' (1977: 79).

Strathern (1997) examines the relationships that become evident during gift giving when people (relations) become objects capable of transmitting agencies in Melanesian contexts. She compares Melanesian contexts of exchange with the Euro-American consumerist cultural construct of 'free-standing' relationships. Strathern uses examples of Western reproductive technologies to demonstrate her point.

Melanesian gifts on the other hand presuppose two kinds of persons, partners divided by their transaction: paternal from maternal kin, fetus from placenta, clansmen from the ground they cultivate, descendants from ancestors (1997: 307).

This way of being where partnerships and relationships endure, according to Strathern, prompts the question:

whether gift-giving in a consumer culture contests the coercive nature of this relationship or is another example of it (1997:307).

This sheds light on the differences (and similarities) between the Euro-American, 'free-standing' consumers, and how consumption and gift exchange affect relationships and ties between Melanesians (a culture where gift exchange creates long lasting partners, or enduring relations). In the West, when money is involved in exchange, the exchange is seen to be complete. In the manner of what can be considered an ideal type of detachable economics, money affords Westerners the ability to walk away (e.g. prostitution), yet they cannot be completely detached from the things that they purchase in a so-called 'free-standing' way.

Kopytoff (1986) applies the use of the social biography to things saying that one would use the same 'rules' with things as would be used for the biography as a person. This method points toward a form of animism where objects are treated as human-persons. For example, questions would be asked such as

What, sociologically, are the biographical possibilities inherent in the objects "status" and in the period and culture, and how are these possibilities realized? Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized "ages" or periods in the thing's "life", and what are the cultural markers for them? How does the thing's use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness? (1986:66).

These questions are useful in examining not only the 'social life of things' but can be applied broadly to all objects that exist in any cultural context. These questions are also useful when

examining the life of the religious 'thing', relics, statues, images, fetishes, or any other object that is religiously contextual.

*The Journal of Material Culture* (Sage) further testifies to materiality's current popularity with its focus on the relationships between artifacts and social relations and culture. It is not the aim of this work, however, to discuss objects in terms of 'artifacts' nor how they affect social relations, but to discuss and question the roles of objects as social and other relations.

Stuart Hall (2003) is also a prominent figure in material culture studies, especially with regards to issues of 'representation', 'meaning' and 'culture'. Hall refers to the 'practices of representation' to signify the symbolism which transmits meaning. He says,

It is by our use of things, and what we say, think and feel about them – how we represent them – that we give them a meaning. In part, we give objects, people and events meaning by the frameworks of interpretation which we bring to them (2003: 3).

Further Hall suggests that representation, instead of being a 'one way transmitter', is better understood as dialogical. Hall's approach is a useful way of thinking about representation because it implies a balance between the human centered application of 'meaning' and the ability of things to inspire new concepts and cultural modes of being. Yet according to Hall, the cultural contexts within which things reside (such as in museums) are subject to change. He writes,

What sustains this 'dialogue' is the presence of shared cultural codes, which cannot guarantee that meanings will remain stable forever – though attempting to fix meaning is exactly why power intervenes in *discourse* (2003: 10).

The *Thinking Through Things* (2007) project is helpful in clarifying debates surrounding the dominant discourses of materiality. This collaborative work sets forth a methodological approach that suggests that instead of seeking out 'significance' and 'meaning' we allow objects to inspire their own theories. The introduction of *Thinking Through Things* comprehensively surveys not only the more recent history underpinning this current 'quiet [anthropological] revolution' (Henare, et al., 2007:7), but also wider issues relating to 'things' in material culture, anthropology, and the problematic nature of the traditional models used in anthropological methodologies. Following the introduction there are nine essays written by contributors that introduce different and creative ethnographic accounts of their informants' 'concern with things' (2007: 21). Not all of the contributors agree with every aspect of the editors' proposed methodological approach of how to 'think through things' but all discuss the issues. In the essays, the 'things' of concern include cigarettes in a Papua New Guinea prison, Mongolian ceremonial objects such as altars and shamanic costumes where one can come to *be* through things, the legal documents and the law in Swaziland, the role of Maori *taonga* in New Zealand in light of recent debates on property rights, what happens when the aim of co-creating and producing new forms of art through the joint collaborations of artists and scientists falter due to issues of ownership and how powder *is* power for Cuban diviners.

I have but one criticism of this work: it does not address the roles of religious objects in Europe, opting instead for Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, Swaziland, Cuba, and Mongolia. When 'things' are addressed in European discourses, they are discussed in terms of Leach's understanding of Gell's theoretical ideas of agency (1998), and Pearce's ideas of museum practice in London (2007). Here, Pearce 'highlights the psychology of collections and the particular manner in which meaning and value are inscribed in the relationships between

Europeans and the material objects they collect' (2007:93). As in many of the works of anthropologists discussed in this review, the roles of religious objects in the everyday lived reality of Western culture are ignored, yet they are addressed in the 'religious' practices of 'others'.

In Miller's edited volume *Materiality* (2005), accounts are used to discuss the fundamental roles objects play through examining a multitude of manifestations from ancient Egypt to Western economics and materialism. These accounts culminate in an argument that that which we (humans) create ends up shaping us, our cultural reflections of ourselves, and our humanity. Miller says that

For a discipline, such as anthropology, that is concerned with what it is to be human, we need to therefore start our discussion of this issue with an acknowledgment that the definition of humanity has often become almost synonymous with the position taken on the question of materiality (2005:2).

Miller explores important questions of relational placement, i.e. where the subject stops and the object begins. Where do objects belong? Miller says,

it will become evident that we can indeed resolve the dualism of subjects and objects through philosophy. But these "resolutions" are so dependent upon the abstract nature of philosophy that in and of themselves they may be of only limited benefit to anthropology (2005:3).

Miller's human-centered approach can be compared with that of Martin Holbraad's (2007) in his chapter "The Power of Powder: Multiplicity and motion in the divinatory cosmology of Cuban Ifa (or *mana*, again)". Holbraad thinks through the thing *ache*, or *ashe*, which he refers to

as the 'Afro-Cuban cousin of *mana*' (2007: 201). *Ache/ashe* is a word that is normally is taken to mean 'grace', magical power, and/or 'all the powers, force, life, the secret of the earth' (2007: 201). Holbraad tells us that elsewhere, *ache* appears as a 'powder that belongs exclusively to a deity, or, yet more specifically, as 'iyefa, the white powder full of virtues which is spread on to Orula's divining board' (2007: 201). Thus Holbraad discusses *ache* as a powder type of substance used by diviners in Cuba during séances. He uses this powdery 'thing' to exemplify how a 'thing' in normative modernist cultural discourse is not the same as a 'thing' in the discourse of Cuban diviners. To the diviners, the powder does not represent or signify power; the powder *is* power. Here, there is no distinction between concept and thing. The concept is the thing. This is an atypical approach to anthropology and stands in contrast to Miller who might argue that power as power does not sufficiently emphasize the agents, or those people involved in physically utilizing the powder.

Demonstrating the versatility of materiality, Rowlands (2005) tells us that some things are more material than others (2005:73). Miller says, 'The implication of Rowlands' chapter is that we need to have much greater sensitivity to relative materiality' (2005: 18). From a materialist perspective, Rowlands says that it is impossible to fuse subject and object as Appadurai does by saying they have 'social lives'. What is in debate here is the argument that all 'things' should not automatically be given their own constitutions when divorced from the processes that created them. Rowlands says,

I include here all those approaches that see persons and things as mutually constitutive in some way and yet start from the premise that things as "social objects" have some a priori existence but do not constitute "a world out there" (2005: 73).

Further, Rowlands argues that the identity of things is ‘constructed through their mediation in a socially constructed field’ (2005: 73). This could be disputed by other theorists who argue that objects are capable of inspiring a multiplicity of theories, not all of which depend on human sociability.

## 2.2 Agency, Animism and Fetishism

I will begin this section with an assertion: Objects can potentially have agency. This is an important assertion because it goes to the heart of some of the most problematic issues in terms of modernity, religion and materiality, and attempting to understand their agency is one of the greater challenges that this work undertakes. Are objects capable of supporting their own discourses? Can objects have agency only through the intentionality of the humans ‘in the neighborhood’ to use Gell’s analogy (1998: 123)? Can matter contain power – or better yet, depending on the context, can matter *be* power? Do objects represent power? Can objects be ‘living’? These questions are not new. Yet new angles on these questions begin to emerge when one begins to look at the project of modernity, as with other dualisms, as being flawed. For example, Latour’s work *We have never been modern* (1993) discusses how the project of modernity is more of a belief system than a reality, saying

The hypothesis of this essay is that the word ‘modern’ designates two sets of entirely different practices which much remain distinct if they are to remain effective, but have recently become confused. The first set of practices, by ‘translation,’ creates mixtures between entirely new types of beings, hybrids of nature and culture. The second, by

'purification', creates two entirely distinct ontological zones: that of human beings on the one hand; that of nonhumans on the other (1993: 10-11).

The project of modernity has helped create a schism whereby humans deny their relationships with the world in exchange for favoring mind over matter. The effects of this have resulted in a type of anthropocentric dominance over the material world and consequently over the animal and plant worlds, too. Latour illustrates the dualist structures upon which our cultural identities influence the ways in which we deal with materiality. He says that

if we have never been modern – at least in the way criticism tells the story – the tortuous relations that we have maintained with the other nature-cultures would also be transformed. Relativism, domination, imperialism, false consciousness, syncretism – all the problems that anthropologists summarize under the loose expression of 'Great Divide' – would be explained differently, thereby modifying comparative anthropology (1993: 12-13).

The problems summarized under the 'Great Divide' *are* being discussed. Meskell writes,

Recent writing on the specific contours of agentic objects or fetishes, as interlocutors between persons, things, and worlds, undermines the fixity of our imposed boundaries. Materiality represents a presence of power in realizing the world, crafting things from nothing, subjects from nonsubjects (2005: 51).

So far the debates establish that objects play dynamic, relational roles in the lived ontological realities. The theories being discussed currently by anthropologists, sociologists, and those who are work within material culture studies express deliberate shifts in understanding the nature of



objectivity and subjectivity, fixed and non-fixed identities, and relationships with matter. As will now be addressed, scholars in the study of religions, anthropologists and sociologists such as Latour, Ingold, Harvey, Scott, Viveiros de Castro, Gell, Johnson, Pels, and Graeber have found relational ways of discussing agency through the subjects of ANT, 'meshwork' and animism and fetishism.

### *Agency*

I will begin this discussion of agency with a discussion of Actor Network Theory: ANT. Latour's (2005) assertion that even the most popular theories 'are not sufficient to describe the many entanglements of humans and non-humans (2005: 84) can be extended to help in understanding why popular or folk practices that involve engaging objects exist outside of doctrine. Latour says,

To put it very simply: A good ANT account is a narrative or a description or a proposition where all the actors do something and don't just sit there. Instead of simply transporting effects without transforming them, each of the points in the new text may become a bifurcation, an event, or the origin of a new translation. As soon as actors are treated not as intermediaries but as mediators they render the movement of the social visible to the reader (2005:128).

ANT can be broadly interpreted and applied to almost any discipline. This does not, however, negate its usefulness. Hicks says, 'For ANT, relations are not simply bilateral: they are much more far-ranging networks that emerge through the actions of both humans and non-humans'. This implies that ANT works as a 'theory of agency' (Hicks, 2010: 75).

Through a collection of essays that work through the complex patterns of life, nature and change, Ingold's *Lines: A Brief History* (2007) shows how the 'lines', or relationships, between things, ideas, places and even time, are misrecognized as straight, linear concepts. Ingold's theory/philosophy/perspective is all encompassing in that it dissolves commonly accepted dualistic boundaries between 'things', placing them, instead, on relational continuums within their own generative processes. In this vein, Ingold challenges the concept of ANT, saying that,

much of its appeal comes from its promise to describe interactions among people (such as scientists and engineers) and the objects with which they deal (such as in the laboratory) in a way that does not concentrate mind or agency in human hands, but rather takes it to be distributed around all the elements that are connected or mutually implicated in a field of action (2007: 85).

Ingold says the term 'meshwork' more adequately describes the relations between humans, their environments, and non-humans than 'network'. Further, he tells us that Latour has observed in hindsight that when the French *acteur réseau* was translated to English, it took on significances that were never intended. The French *réseau* does not imply the same connectivity as a network, but

just as well netting...to woven fabric, the racery of lace, the plexus of the nervous system or the web of a spider. The lines of the spider's web, for example, quite unlike those of the communications network, do not connect points or join things up. Secreted from the body of the spider as it moves, they are the lines *along* which it acts and perceives (2007: 85)

Ingold's work *When ANT meets SPIDER: Social theory for Anthropods* (2008) is a continuation of this perception of the commonly accepted understanding of ANT. Here, ANT and SPIDER are in philosophical dialogue with one another about the nature of the 'network' and the nature of 'meshwork'. In terms of materiality, the network comprises social relations, inclusive of 'objects', who are 'not just passive objects. I [ANT] am bound up in relations with them, as I am with my fellow ants. They, too, are part of the network' (2008: 91). SPIDER challenges this idea of ANT's network, arguing that since 'bits and pieces' of things are 'assembled so as to make things happen', then 'Every "relation" in the network, then, is a connection between one thing and another. As such the relation has no material presence'. SPIDER continues, arguing that the lines of her web are the lines through which she moves. She says that they are trails of herself as she moves throughout her environment perceiving and acting in the world (2008: 91). Through this dialogue, Ingold is saying that the meshwork (SPIDER's web) foregrounds the network, i.e. without taking into account the complexity of the origins of the material presence of the objects within the meshwork, the connections that join up the network cannot be established. Yet here, objects are mediumistic. Ingold argues that for agency to be present, nervous systems must also be present. Attention must be paid for action to take place, and attentive movement/action is what *should* constitute agency. He says 'Our concept of agency must make allowance for the real complexity of living organisms, as opposed to inert matter'. Then, 'To attribute agency to objects that do not grow or develop, that consequently embody no skill, and whose movement is not therefore coupled to their perception, is ludicrous' (2008: 94).

In contrast to Ingold's perspective, Barad (2007) argues that 'matter and meaning are not separate elements. They are inextricably fused together, and no event, no matter how energetic, can tear them asunder' (2007: 3). Drawing on social science, feminist, philosophy, postcolonial,

quantum physics and more, Barad sets out to found a 'new ontology, epistemology, and ethics, including a new understanding of the nature of scientific practices' (25). In doing this, Barad

demonstrates how and why we must understand in an *integral* way the roles of human and nonhuman, material and discursive, and natural and cultural factors in scientific and other practices', saying that a new approach is needed to help build 'meaningful conversations between the sciences and other areas of study (2007: 25).

In terms of agency and the question of human intentionality, Barad says that

the space of agency is not restricted to the possibilities for human action. But neither is it simply the case that agency should be granted to nonhumans as well as humans, or that agency can be distributed over nonhuman and human forms. What is at issue, rather, are the possibilities for the iterative reconfiguring of the materiality of human, nonhuman, cyborgian, and other such forms. Holding the category "human" ("nonhuman") fixed (or at least presuming tht one can) excludes an entire range of possibilities in advance, eliding important dimensions of the workings of agency (Barad, 2007: 178).

Then, crucial to the underpinnings of this thesis, Barad says,

*agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has. It cannot be designated as an attribute of subjects or objects (as they do not preexist as such). It is not an attribute whatsoever. Agency is "doing" or "being" in its intra-activity. It is the enactment of iterative changes to particular practices – iterative reconfiguring of topological manifolds of spacetime-matter relations – through the dynamics of intra-activity (Barad, 2007: 178).*

This theory of matter and agency is complementary the new animism, as discussed by Harvey (2005b).

### *Animism*

Animism has a long history within the academy. Found in Europe's Christian and colonial pasts, terms such as animism and fetishism have generally been applied to those practices and beliefs of 'others', whether those others are Catholic others, Pagan others, or colonized others.

Beginning with Tylor (1913 [1871]), his animism asserts that in animistic societies, matter contains spirits. These spirits are alien beings that come from outside of matter and take up residence in 'dead' objects (1913 [1871], I: 426), and this view of animism is still with us.

Harvey's (2005b) book *Animism: Respecting the Living World* offers a different perspective to the debate. Harvey introduces his work as follows:

The newer usage [of animism] refers to a concern with knowing how to behave appropriately towards persons, not all of whom are human. It refers to the widespread indigenous and increasingly popular 'alternative' understanding that humans share this world with a wide range of persons, only some of whom are human. While it may be important to know whether one is encountering a person or an object, the really significant question for animists of the 'new' kind is how persons are to be treated or acted towards (2005b: xi).

The idea of 'other-than-human persons' comes from Hallowell's (1960) interpretation of the Ojibwe 'world view' that 'persons' are all around us, some are human and others are other than human. The new animism proposes that in acknowledging the personhood of the world's many inhabitants, respectful ways of engagement can be learned. Harvey tells us that animism has

carried two different meanings in the discussions of academics from many different disciplines. First, he tells us that it has been considered a 'label for an alleged mistake in which people confuse inanimate matter for living beings in some way' and that more recently it has begun to be considered another label for 'a style of worldview that recognises the personhood of many beings with whom humans share this world' (2005b: 205). He writes,

Ojibwe-language speakers are animists at least on the grounds that they address some rocks and some weather systems as persons. Some plants and some human-made artefacts are persons. It is not that Ojibwe speakers attribute human-likeness to 'inanimate objects', but that they engage with a cosmos full of persons, only some of whom are humans. Ojibwe animism does not experience everything as living (2005b: 35).

This is not to say that objects are 'living' all the time, every day. They are, however, 'alive' when they are participating in relationship, but not because spirits take up residence in matter. The relational nature of animism helps in dealing with materiality's problematic nature because, in its flexibility, it both challenges and incorporates Western culturally inherited dualistic notions such as spirit versus matter, or subject versus object. Subjecthood is achieved through relationships.

In reference to the Cree understanding of the world, Scott writes 'The attribution of life to the non-living is not what occurs in a world perceived as so many different modalities of life, but of emergence'(2006:61). Scott's idea of ontological emergence and personhood is simultaneous and relevant to place, time and location. Arguing for a relational epistemology, Scott uses Bird-

David's (1999) 'discussion of Nayaka talking with trees' to exemplify a point. Bird-David writes,

In the interaction of a human with a tree, intelligence lies not 'inside the head of the human actor, let alone inside the fabric of the tree. Rather, it is immanent in the total system of perception and action constituted by the co-presence of the human and the tree within a wider environment (2006: 53).

However, according to Scott, both Bird-David and Ingold see the attribution of personhood as coming *after* the engagement with the tree, i.e. after epistemological value has already been attributed. He argues that engagement and response are simultaneous, immanent 'and mutually reinforcing in our experience of the world' (2006: 61).

Based on an ethnography of the Araweté, a Tupi-Guarani people of Eastern Amazonia, Viveiros de Castro's work *From the Enemy's Point of View: Humanity and Divinity in an Amazonian Society* (1992) describes and interprets 'Araweté cosmology, approached from the perspective of concepts about the person, death, Divinity, and systems of shamanism and warfare'. He tells us that 'the theme of divine cannibalism' is 'central to the Araweté definition of the human condition' (1992: xv). Further, 'the complex of relations between human beings and the gods is the most strategic avenue to understanding Araweté society'. For the Araweté, death is the transitional, 'productive event' where persons are 'actualized', neither death nor life being understood in opposition to one another (where one is positive and the other is negative). Arawete society is not 'dialectic' (1992: 4). From this study, Viveiros de Castro depicts 'a native anthropology where concepts of alterity and Becoming will emerge as the defining qualities and processes of human Being' (1992: xvi).

Drawing on the ethnography described in *The Enemy's Point of View* (1992), Viveiros de Castro's (2000) article 'Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism'

deals with that aspect of Amerindian thought which has been called its 'perspectival quality' (Århem 1993): the conception, common to many peoples of the continent, according to which the world is inhabited by different sorts of subjects or persons, human and non-human, which apprehend reality from distinct points of view (2000: 469).

In this article, Viveiros de Castro sets out to better understand the conceptual dichotomies found in Western cultural heritage through a comparison with those 'operating in Amerindian perspectivist cosmologies' (2000: 470). Acknowledging the difficulties in this task, Viveiros de Castro (2004b) questions what happens when 'Western' perspectives are compared with those of Amazonian/indigenous perspectives. He argues that translation of language

becomes an operation of differentiation – a production of difference – that connects the two discourses to the precise extent to which they are not saying the same thing, in so far as they point to discordant exteriorities beyond the equivocal homonyms between them (2004b: 20).

He first challenges what he calls 'the classic distinction between Nature and Culture' saying that they 'cannot be used to describe domains internal to non-Western cosmologies without first undergoing a rigorous ethnographic critique' (2000: 469). According to Viveiros de Castro, other sets of dualistic 'conceptual schemes' (2000: 470) fall under the headings of 'Nature' and 'Culture': 'universal and particular, objective and subjective, physical and social, fact and value, the given and the instituted, necessity and spontaneity, immanence and transcendence, body and mind, animality and humanity, among many more' (2000: 469-470). As a solution to these sets of dualities, Viveiros de Castro suggests the term 'multi-naturalism' to account for those



qualities that constitute Amerindian thought, saying that 'the Amerindian conception would suppose a spiritual unity and a corporeal diversity' (2000: 470). Humans are humans, but animals are also humans hiding behind animal masks. In sum,

'the common point of reference all beings of nature is not humans as a species but rather humanity as a condition' (Descola 1986: 120) (Viveiros de Castro, 2000: 472).

Within this 'corporeal diversity' one can find 'perspectivism', which, according to Viveiros de Castro, is 'reminiscent of the notion of 'animism' (2000: 472). He defines animism as 'an ontology which postulates the social character of relations between humans non-humans: the space between nature and society is itself social (2000: 473). What is considered a 'person' in Amerindian conception is also discussed here. Viveiros de Castro tells us that self-reference is avoided, i.e.

names are not spoken by the bearers nor in their presence; to name is to externalize, to separate (from) the subject. Thus self-references such as 'people' mean 'person', not 'member of the human species', and they are personal pronouns registering the point of view of the subject talking, not proper names. To say, then, that animals and spirits are people is to say that they are persons, and to attribute to non-humans the capacities of conscious intentionality and agency which define the position of the subject (2000: 476).

Further, Viveiros de Castro tells us that whatever has a soul can potentially have a 'point of view'. Viveiros de Castro (2004a) writes,

Amerindian perspectivism can be seen as a kind of radical polytheism (or rather, henotheism) applied to a universe which recognises no ontological dualism between created matter and Creator Spirit (2004a: 482).

Viveiros de Castro criticizes Cartesian dualities saying that they have led academics toward the desire to resolve dualities through the idea that creating one unifying principle will solve these problems. Viveiros de Castro says,

Virtually all attacks on Cartesian and other dualisms consider that two is already too much – we need just one (one principle, one substance, one reality). As far as Amerindian cosmologies are concerned, it would appear that two is not enough (2004a: 482).

With this in mind, Viveiros de Castro promotes more diversified ontological awarenesses that go beyond the Western cultural dualisms so commonplace within anthropology and other academic disciplines. Viveiros de Castro further writes,

Personhood and ‘perspectivity’ – the capacity to occupy a point of view – is a question of degree and context, rather than an absolute, diacritical property of particular species...Artefacts have this interestingly ambiguous ontology: they are objects that necessarily point to a subject; as congealed actions, they are material embodiments of non-material intentionality (2004a: 470).

Work with the Araweté and Yawalapíti in the 1970s and 1980s where Viveiros de Castro ‘like any ethnographer...had to confront different indigenous notions about nonhuman agency and personhood’ (2007: 153) further inspired ideas addressed in ‘The Crystal Forest: Notes on the Ontology of Amazonian Spirits’ (2007). In this article, Viveiros de Castro presents a dialogue between Davi Kopenawa (Yanomami thinker and political leader) and Bruce Alpert (anthropologist) in relation to the *xapiripë*, ‘the animal ancestors’ or ‘shamanic spirits’ who interact with the shamans of his people’ (2007: 153). Through this dialogue, Viveiros de Castro wishes to

call attention to some recurrent features of the mode of existence and manifestation of spirits in indigenous Amazonia. In particular, I [Viveiros de Castro] take Kopenawa's discourse as expressing a pan-Amazonian conception in which the notions we translate as 'spirit' denote an ontological mode of the 'intensive virtual multiplicity' type (2007: 155).

Viveiros de Castro further addresses the ways in which translations from indigenous languages reflect differences in ontological perceptivity. He tells us that the word *xapiripë*

designates *utupë*, image, vital principle, true interiority or essence (Kopenawa & Alpert 2003: 72 n. 28) of the animals and other beings of the forest, and at the same time the immortal images of a first archaic humanity, composed of Yanomami with animal names that transformed into the animals of the present (2007: 155).

Humanity and animality are transitional cross-dimensions. Further, according to Viveiros de Castro, the word 'shaman' (becoming a shaman) is synonymous with 'spirit' (becoming a spirit). He tells us that

Amazonian concepts of 'spirit' do not designate a class or genus of nonhumans but a certain obscure vicinity between the human and the nonhuman, a secret communication which rather than passing through the redundancy between them (their 'community'), passes through their disparity (their 'incommunity') (2007: 160).

Using Gell's analogy of the Chinese diplomat in London 'who does not look like China, but in London, China looks like him' (1998: 98) to make his point, Viveiros de Castro says that the *xapiripë* 'do not look like animals, but in the mytho-shamanic context, animals do look like them' (2007: 160). This analogy helps us to better understand the nature of Amazonian

cosmologies where agency is an 'event' or a heterogenic 'becoming' (an intensive superposition of states), not a 'process' of 'change' (an extensive transposition of homogenic states)' (2007: 157). These events must, for example, be captured by the agency of shamans (2007: 155).

Gell (1998), like Viveiros de Castro, works on the basis that personhood depends on context. Yet for Gell, in reference to objects, agency is representational of human interpretation. Gell says that 'social agents' can be drawn from categories which are as different as chalk and cheese' due to the fact that the term 'social agency' is not based on the agents who are being social as biological beings in the same sense that humans are. In other words, it does not matter whether a social agent is a thing or person. The importance lies in how that thing or person is being related to. He writes, 'All that may be necessary for stocks and stones to become 'social agents' in the sense that we require, is that there should be actual human persons/agents 'in the neighbourhood' of these inert objects, not that they should be biologically human persons themselves' (Gell, 1998: 123).

Leach challenges Gell's theory saying that it is too human centred and based on their representational status in the mind of their agents (2007: 183). This is comparable to both Viveiros de Castro's (2004) idea of animism and to the potential 'multiplicity' of theories put forth by the *Thinking Through Things* (2007) project. Leach says that the implication of this human centered approach imposes the same subject/object dualities that many scholars are currently trying to move away from, i.e.

When all is said and done, we are left with the individual mind and its representations, and with the idea that non-humans can only be agents by proxy: There are real subjects,

namely we ourselves, and then there are those second-class citizens of subject-dom (i.e. objects and the like) (Leach, 2007: 183).

The 'human centeredness' of Gell's form of proposed agency, although used here at points, solves only part of the problem. Gell (1998) does not suggest or support ontologies of things independent of human agency, as suggested by Henare, et al. (2007) in *Thinking Through Things*, but is more concerned with art as 'instrumental action', i.e. the means by which creators of art influence the thoughts and actions of the people around them; and how people influence art. Human beings and their intentionality 'in the neighborhood' affect the status and agency of art objects. What Gell does not address are the potentialities of personhood inherent in art and other objects when humans are not present.

### *Fetish*

Fetishism is interesting to this thesis because it is matter specific animism and issues of value and fetishism go hand in hand in similar ways to how issues of value and relics go hand in hand. Both fetishes and relics are known for their poetic, mysterious, and spiritual value while also being famous for their roles as negotiators and mediators, i.e. their simultaneous economic and/or exchange value. Further, it can be argued that both fetishes and relics are persons and things simultaneously. Relics have a particular kind of biography due to their human origins, and fetishes are extensions of fetishists, which give them yet another particular type of biography as the fetish can be either an external body part or an extension of the fetishist. Both of these particulars fall outside the framework of what constitutes the 'normal' or 'everyday' commodities discussed by Appadurai, and some of the more subtly present yet monumental everyday things discussed by Miller (2005).

The rise of contemporary literature about the fetish demonstrates some of roles that materiality can play when theoretical questions concerning objects and representation, and/or transcendence and immanence are posed. This discussion is best initiated with the etymology of the word. Johnson writes,

Fortunately, since it is a comparative term, the fetish has no etymological anchor heavier than “that which is made” and can always be spun in the opposite direction. Hence, James Clifford's revision: “we can return to them . . . their lost status as fetishes—not specimens of a deviant or exotic ‘fetichism’ but *our own* fetishes”. This tactic, necessarily personal, would accord to things in collections the power to fixate rather than simply the capacity to edify or inform. African and Oceanian artifacts could once again be *objets sauvages*, sources of fascination with the power to disconcert. Seen in their resistance to classification they could remind us of our *lack* of self-possession, or the artifices we employ to gather a world around us (Johnson, 2000: 229).

Here we find that the root of word lies in creation and creativity. A fetish is something that is continually invented, destroyed, and reinvented with each relational encounter and it has the ability to make and undo worlds accordingly. Its relational status relates directly to space, time and territory. Johnson argues that the fetish should not be considered an object but a ‘cognitive and existential problem of location; it is about issues of relating the self to time and space. It is about territorialization’ (2000: 248). Johnson gives us a history of the fetish and tells us how it was marginalized in scholarly discourses for many decades. He writes,

Charles de Brosses's 1760 use of *fetiché*, and for the first time, *fetichisme* as a stage of human development was elaborated by Auguste Comte as a sub-area of his tripartite

schema, and the rest of the story is a familiar one in the history of the study of religion. De Brosses's and Comte's "*fetichisme*" was replaced by "animism" under the Tylorean evolutionist paradigm and then by Marett's "pre-animism" before being dealt a final death blow, at least in its denotation of a particular religious mode, by Durkheim and Mauss (e.g., Durkheim: 203) (2000: 255).

Manning and Meneley (2008) observe the problematic nature of materiality in religion in the 'untranscended materiality' of the fetish, or that which was projected on to the African fetish by European traders and colonizers. According to Manning and Meneley, the fetish denoted a form of savage, primitive religious expression (2008: 289). Always set in contrast to transcended materiality, the fetish has remained something that conjures up ideas of sexual obsession, African *juju*, withered dead animal feet, clay, cowrie shells, and old hair clippings. Compared with the term 'idolatry' (which points toward problematic issues of representation) the fetish unashamedly embodies. It *is* that which it represents. It is powerful. The same misunderstandings and polemics that haunt statues, images and idols as to whether or not the deity inhabits the 'thing' are not found here.

Manning and Menely (2008) suggest that anthropologists re examine the untranscended materiality of the fetish which differs from the equally problematic idol. The difference being that the idol is often understood as a representation of a god/deity, while the fetish remains in a state of non-representation.

That is, the idol is a material representation of that which does not exist while in the fetish the opposition between material sign and transcendent signifier is absent: 'the

fetish is precisely *not* a material signifier referring beyond itself' (Pietz 1985: 15)  
(Manning and Menely, 2008: 293).

Pels suggests that the fetish's untranscended materiality be at the foreground of the materiality debate because it beckons 'its students to sojourn in the border zones that divide mind and matter, the animate and inanimate' (1998: 91). The fetish, according to Pels, is 'an object of *abnormal traffic*' (1998: 94). He says,

The fetish foregrounds materiality because it is the most aggressive expression of the social life of things: not merely alive, it is an "animated entit[y] that can dominate persons" (Taussig 1980: 25). Fetishism is animism with vengeance. Its matter strikes back (1998: 91).

Addressing the difference between animism and fetishism, Pels says that animism is the spirit *in* matter, and that fetishism is the spirit *of* matter.

In the article "Materials Against Materiality" (2011: 28), Ingold makes a major contribution to the materiality debate, suggesting that we 'direct our attention from the materiality of objects to the properties of materials'. He challenges Pels' assertion that that animism is the spirit *in* matter, and the fetish is the spirit *of* matter (Pels, 1998: 91) by arguing that it is not life that is in matter, but matter, in all its complexities, that is in life (Ingold, 2007b: 12). He says Pels' argument that 'the fetish is an object that, by virtue of its sheer material presence, affects the course of affairs (1998: 94-95)' is an important step in the right direction, but it only takes us halfway'. Ingold tells us that the fetish, on the one hand, recognizes that the materials found inherently in objects have power, but that as a discourse it 'remains trapped' in a dualistic construct which separates the mental from the material. The fetish, cannot, 'therefore



countenance the properties of materials save as aspects of the inherent materiality of objects' (2011: 28). Ingold contributes to this debate, arguing that the 'hybrid' quality of Pels' fetish misrecognizes the 'active properties of materials as a power of the materiality of objects'. Instead, Ingold suggests, materials should be restored

to the generative fluxes of the world of materials in which they came into being and continue to subsist. This view, that things are in life rather than that life is in things, is diametrically opposed to the conventional anthropological understanding of animism, invoked by Pels (1998, 94) and harking back to the classic work of Edward Tylor, according to which it entails the attribution of life, spirit or agency to objects that are really inert (2011: 29).

Ingold's view of objects is that they are transformative. Their substances and *being* are not subject *only* to the agencies attributed by the mental activity of humans. He writes, 'As such, they are born and grow within the current of materials, and participate from within their further transformation' (2011: 29).

Graeber (2005), contributing to theories of social creativity to the debate, re imagines the fetish as a way of creating new relations (2005: 407). He tells us that the fetish is collaborative, creative project made in moments of contractual agreements between people who had very little in common. The fetish has the power to bind these agreements making any party who decided to break the contract punishable. Graeber also introduces the concept of the 'fetish zone'. The 'fetish zone' illustrates the zone, or spaces, that exist between, for example, subject and object, gift and giver. Graeber says that the 'fetish zone' is the place that, during the trade encounters between Europeans and Africans in the 1600's,

Europeans were trying to evacuate; [where] everything was social, nothing was fixed, therefore everything was both material and spiritual simultaneously (2005:432).

The fetish zone can be theoretically applied to the transformative mediatory spaces beyond dualistic constructs of the sacred and the profane, the material and the transcendent, and between concepts of mind, spirit and matter. For this reason, Graeber and his 'fetish zone' will receive further engagement in Chapters 6 and 7.

### *Conclusion to Literature Review*

The works discussed in this review involve brief introductions to literature concerning some of the core theoretical literature produced by social theorists with regards to how materiality is current being theorized. It also involves many works of contemporary scholars that deal with religious materiality specifically. A broad context is revealed where scholars are discussing materiality and agency generally. This review has found that questions surrounding the agency of Western religious 'things' in marked off, public, private, and/or sacred spaces remain largely, but not entirely, overlooked. There are gaps in understanding what happens beyond the established constructs of socialization, representation, meaning, and/or spirit, mind and matter in terms of religious objects and relational engagement. Also discussed here are critical relational discourses that actively facilitate the roles of religious objects such as ritual, performance, animism, and fetishism. All of these and more are engaged in further detail in Chapters 6 and 7, after the ethnographic accounts, and as the thesis unfolds to reach its conclusions.

## Chapter 3

### *Methodological Approach*

The core of this thesis is centered on the theme of 'relationships', i.e. relationships between statues and devotees. Spending time with devotees who regularly spend time with statues of the Goddess and Virgin as well as spending time with the statues myself, has led to the development of a *relational methodology*. A relational methodological approach complements and assists qualitative research methods where participant-observation in the form of dialogical, structured, semi-structured and informal interviews has taken place. A relational methodology does, however, favor informal interviews and casual conversations (where note taking is done *after* the event) so that recording and recording equipment do not impede or inhibit the 'natural flow' of conversation. Three foundations of this method are discussed below: Harvey's 'guesthood', *Thinking Through Things*, and Primiano's inductive approach.

Harvey's (2003) 'Guesthood as Ethical Decolonising Research Method' acknowledges that 'the field', or research situation, is inevitably changed by the presence of the researcher (a notion that usually carries negative connotations because it points towards questions of behavioral authenticity). Harvey writes

The recognition that the act of observation changes things, including the observer (Pratchett 1994: 8), requires an acknowledgment that researchers change that which they research (however they do it) as well as themselves (2003: 142).

A relational methodology benefits from this acknowledgement. If, for example, Gell's 'human centered agency' is considered, then the researcher being relationally present helps to answer the thesis questions by proposing that information arises according to who or what is 'in the

neighborhood' (1998: 128), i.e. devotees, statues, other objects such as offerings, and me.

Inspired by the *Thinking Through Things* methodological approach (Henare et al., 2007) which asserts that 'things' are capable of supporting their own discourses apart from human agents, a relational methodology adequately addresses the research questions because it takes into consideration all who are present during moments of research enquiry, i.e. human persons, object persons, and other persons who might be 'looking on' without being noticed. Primiano's (1995) inductive approach to vernacular religion as a method is also addressed because he discusses the implications of conducting research sensitively, where private, intimate encounters (here applied to statues) occur.

### *Qualitative Research and Participant Observation*

Participant observation is the metaphorical grandfather of my relational methodology.

Interviewing/speaking with people directly, as well as participating in ritual practices and observances, allows for more detailed experiences and accounts of information to be heard, recorded and most importantly, *understood*. David Goa (2000) tells us that,

It [research] clearly requires that you enter this landscape as someone interested in understanding, and I use the word advisedly. What we seek is 'understanding', not simply information (2000: 49-50).

However, the term 'understanding', while superficially effective, does not have the ability to accurately and deeply describe the multi-layered mix of complex emotions, feelings, thoughts, relationships and imaginations that create the whole of devotion and votive practice surrounding religious materiality. The researcher's arrival at clear understanding can best be attained, not only through empathic means of participating and observing, but through the use of dialogical,

reflexive, relational methodologies where the researcher takes his/her position as seriously as he/she takes the positions, perspectives and beliefs of the people being 'observed' or those being 'participated with'. In this instance they are those would be actors in relational encounters with religious objects.

Qualitative research methods are suitable for this project because both objects and performers of religious expression are volatile, changing things that must be given the courtesy of fluidity and range of movement. A significant amount of time, personal contact and sensitivity are required to work with this project, which the more data driven approach used by quantitative research methods is not capable of providing. As this research is based upon intimate relationships with statues of the feminine divine, a research approach based on relational engagement is compatible with qualitative methods. As relationships are sometimes impeded by recording equipment, on many occasions during participant observation I have had to leave fieldwork situations in order to take notes with regards to significant material and observations. I found relaxed, unrecorded conversations to be the best way to extrapolate information. I did not always take notes so as not to interrupt the process but dialogue with hosts always enabled me to check the accuracy of my understanding if not of their precise words. Conducting qualitative research allows for personal relationships to develop between researcher and 'informants' and re-visits can often be expected to take place.

During formal and semi-formal interviews, I often found that the production of the consent form created tensions. People do not like signing forms if there is any confusion at all to what purposes the information will be used. These tensions (if any) were often dissipated with further explanation and once I made clear to informants that the forms also protected them, i.e. they

have the right to withdraw any information they do not wish used at any given time, and their names would not be used if this is what they requested.

Participant observation, while valid and applicable, is a reductionist based, ethnographically oriented anthropological research model from which new methodologies are being refined and based. Although it is used in principle in this research, it is not fully capable of adequately testing the role of materiality in contemporary religious contexts because, by its own origin and definition, it is dualistic. It implies *not relating*. To clarify, although relationships inevitably form during fieldwork encounters, participating and observing are two different modes of action that point to being caught in a constant state of tension, i.e. the researcher remains aloof in the mind, critically analyzing and reproducing information, while the researcher participates in events giving the illusion of fully taking part, or participating. Harvey writes,

If phenomenological research encourages a high degree of empathic engagement, it usually steps back from full participation. It seems acceptable to “walk in the shoes” of those among whom one researches, but only so long as it is clear that the shoes are borrowed (2004: 265).

It does not, however, need to be this way. A more relational approach converts the researcher from ‘participant observer’ to ‘researcher actively relating’ with his/her whole being. A relational methodology implies not being an ‘outsider’ or an ‘insider’. It implies being something ‘other’. A relational methodology takes the researcher to the transformative zone of relationality where relationships are not ‘cut and dry’. They are volatile and changeable. Participant observer researchers will have also been conducting research relationally, but within the etic and emic

confines required by participant observation. A relational approach adds another dimension, a relational dimension to research that signifies more holistic engagement with informants.

### *Guesthood as Methodological Approach*

Guesthood as a research method that came about through Harvey's suggestion that,

academics could benefit considerably from considering Maori protocols in which strangers are turned, by careful stages, into guests rather than enemies, and should thereafter enact and perform their part of that complex relational role with integrity and respect (Harvey, 2003:126).

I am studying relational encounters with objects who are actually subjects, and these engagements require an understanding of relationships and intimacy rather than the glare of the critical, rational, reductionist, eye. For that matter, this research requires an *invitation*. Working on the Maori knowledge that every stranger is a potential enemy until they are turned into a guest, Harvey's proposal states that academics should not assume that their role as researcher grants them instant and favorable access to those peoples that they wish to research. One must be invited. Harvey says

Guest-researchers recognise that knowledge is gained in relationships, performance, negotiation and that these require active presence and a fuller participation than that available even to those who deem themselves participant observers (Harvey, 2003:142).

What better method to use in a thesis based on relationships?

Harvey's proposal of using guesthood as protocol also offers a remedial solution to the ethical problem that those being researched might have concerns about what academics do with the

knowledge they obtain. This fear is founded on past abuses where researchers have used their positions in the field to make false and inaccurate claims and value judgments based on divisive 'us and them' academic protocol. Hence, Harvey says that a 'guest-researcher will recognise the powerful priority, sovereignty and intellectual property rights of hosts' (Harvey, 2003:142). In other words, the potential of the researcher being transformed into a 'guest' and the person or group being researched becoming a 'host' strikes a power balance whereby the host has to know what is being said about him/her/them; and the guest-researcher has the courtesy and respect not to engage in any behavior that the host might find offensive, such as embellishing or manipulating information. This dialogical, relational approach means 'checking' information with informants, i.e. the guest's interpretations about what is actually going on in research situations. Being a guest researcher means acknowledging that the host is in the more powerful position than the guest; but that guests still have the right to say what they think, argue, agree, or disagree freely, and that includes dialogically disagreeing with hosts about what the guest researcher 'thinks' they are doing.

If the researcher is truly achieving 'guest status' then the researcher should also not be obliged to accept negative assumptions that the hosts might have about him/her, even out of politeness. The guest researcher should be permitted to defend his or herself as he or she might in an 'ordinary' situation that is not centered on research. Sympathetic to past abuses and offenses that have befallen groups at the hands of researchers who have not behaved as guests, the guest researcher should be quick to acknowledge this and put the fears of the hosts at rest. Further, there is also the possibility that guest researchers and hosts might not 'click' and the researcher may have to accept that he or she has not achieved guest status and has remained an 'enemy'. In



this case the researcher should recognize and respect this lack of guest researcher/host chemistry and not force the creation of relationships out the need for gathering information.

Given that relations are going well, being a guest-researcher also implies collaboration on projects, from which a great deal more can be learned as the 'insider/ outsider' divide can potentially dissolve and be transformed into dialogical, power sharing relationships where mutual respect is given and received. Guesthood produces more satisfactory results for everyone involved where basic participant observation maintains a more guarded researcher/informant divide.

#### *A method of 'things'*

Methodological approaches in most disciplines have generally involved the distinct separations that define binary opposites such as subject and object, nature and culture, non-humans from humans, or idea from material. In response to the dualism found in the experience/analysis divide of anthropological discourse, *Thinking Through Things* (2007) offers a fresh methodological approach to an artifact-based study of 'things' that has been useful to how I have begun to 'think about things'. Miller (2005) was correct when he wrote in the introduction to *Materiality* that it is 'entirely possible to have a theory of objects as artifacts. Indeed, there are likely to be many of these' (2005:7). Hence, the editors have compiled essays that have done just that. They have created a 'thing' theory. Instead of explaining away ethnographic accounts of the engagement with 'things' in terms of representation, significance and meaning, the *Thinking Through Things* project renders both researchers and things capable of producing a multiplicity of creative theories, novel ideas and concepts where "the 'things' themselves dictate a *plurality* of ontologies" (Henare, et al., 2007:7). This project moves toward

the absolute productivity of non-definition – towards a new impulse within anthropology to move beyond the development of evermore nuanced filters through which to pass phenomena, through to engagements with things as conduits for concept production (Henare, et al., 2007: 7).

A significant factor of this approach (one that I have tried to employ throughout this work, is compatible with the inductive approach) rests on the suggestion that the term ‘worlds’ is adopted in the place of ‘worldview’. The use of the word ‘worlds’ implies a respectful distance that allows for the possibility of being a good guest researcher and thereby *not* understanding (or trying to understand) everything about the relationships that people have with statues and offerings. In many instances it is not appropriate to intrude upon the personal and intimate relationships that people have with their divine focus, i.e. many of the performances and interactions that take place between devotees and statues of the Goddess and Virgin are done (as the case studies will demonstrate) in matters of need. Further, those needs are expressed to feminine deities who often play motherly roles. In line with the work of Viveiros de Castro (2004a), Latour (2005), and Ingold (2011), the usage of ‘worlds’ rather than ‘worldview’ helps curb the temptation to search out ‘meaning’ or ‘significance’ or ‘representation’ in informants’ actions and in the objects they relate to. Instead I have tried to listen and respect what others say they are doing and why they say they are doing it. As Vivieros de Castro says,

[A]nthropology is a discipline plagued since its inception by epistemological angst. The most Kantian of disciplines, anthropology is practiced as if its paramount task were to explain how it comes to know (to represent) its object – an object also defined as knowledge (or representation). Is it possible to know it? It is decent to know it? Do we really know it, or do we see it (and ourselves) through a glass, darkly? (2004: 483)

Thinking through “things” requires us to engage with people who live in different worlds. In researching and discussing materiality we are engaging both with epistemology (what people believe about the world) and ontology or, more adequately, *ontologies*.

I do not, however, think that a discourse based on the objects themselves providing researchers with their own creative theories ‘ticks all the boxes’. Like the flattering cut of a dress, it might help in dealing with problem areas, but it will not adequately penetrate the problems Western researchers face. For example, an object based discourse (opposed to a purely ‘anthro’-based discourse where objects have no agency apart from that which humans ‘allow’ them to have) allows for a certain amount of creativity to come into play in terms of theoretical approaches. Seeing that creativity plays an important role in my case studies, particularly in the case of the Glastonbury Goddess, room for the creation of creative, unorthodox theories is welcome. Miller is correct to criticize how the *Thinking Through Things* methodology has left out the role of human agency. Yet Miller’s overemphasis on the human-centered agency of objects is also lacking in that human interpretations of the roles of objects will often be representational. My methodological approach, however, can not only be considered relational, but *co-relational*. I am looking at that which is created *between* devotees and statues, and the negotiations that ensue accordingly. This applies to the fieldwork through my observations that statues and figures are *animate* in moments of relationship with devotees, an observation that is taken from the fact that devotees often speak to, give gifts and otherwise engage their statues of devotion. A relational methodology addresses this because it allows, like devotees allow, objects to be, become, much more than ‘objects’. A relational stance lets the ‘concept *be* the thing’, or the ‘thing *be* the concept’ (Henare, et al., 2007), and a good guest researcher will respect this emergence of personhood instead of maintaining a modern, rational, even scholarly distance.

*An Inductive Approach to Vernacular Religion*

Guest researchers are well suited to the unpredictable terrain that makes up the study of vernacular religion and relationships with religious materiality such as in the cases of the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess. Leonard Primiano (1995) says,

Vernacular religion, as an approach embracing theory and method, incorporates attention to such ongoing interpretations and negotiations of religion within groups and institutions by providing theoretical awareness and ethnographic flexibility to the study of such individual creations of religion (1995: 51).

This is useful because it approaches the performances and devotions of Goddess Pagans and Catholic devotees as volatile, subjective experiences. Negotiations with the statues take place and creativity is a significant factor to both religiosities. For these reasons inductive approaches have been taken in this work to complement the usage of the vernacular religion approach. Although I had ideas about what kinds of theories I might produce in the beginning of the project, I did not enter into the work with a theory to prove or disprove (as with deduction). I went into the project with the inductive process in mind. I began with observations from which I drew out patterns. I came up with some ideas that might hypothetically lead to theories, and then I created theories (there are, in fact, more than one, but they are cohesive) capable of aiding in the understanding of the nature of religion in its performative, verb-like form, and the relationships that take place in shrine and temple settings with materiality.

Primiano writes,

Religion, as it is practiced and perceived calls out for an inductive approach which provides an alternative to the inadequacies of the two-tiered model. An inductive approach does more than simply extrapolate general principles from particular data. It generates a theory of and method for the study of religion based on criteria of religious validity established by the inner experience and perception of the believer. Scholarship on lived religion is, however, never a purely objective position, but rather a subjective composite of various analytical vantage points. A presentation of the beliefs of others occurs always through the filter of the empathetic perception and interpretation of the scholar. The inductive process balances the scholar's own knowledge and perspectives with the scholar's empathetic understanding of the individuals being studied. In this sense, the concerns of an inductive approach are oriented to the attempts of scholars to interpret cultural data in a way that is meaningful to their informants, as well as theoretically rigorous and responsible (1995: 40-41).

Although Primiano asserts that inductions should be made from the 'inner experience and perception of the believer', which is correct – we are concerned with what devotees and actors in relational encounters with objects say they are doing – I have also been looking at how those inner experiences and belief perceptions have affected the creation of and relationships with objects. Inner experience or belief in these case studies is not independent of the physical expressions that stem from relationships with objects. Methods in studying religious materiality do not fully benefit from being solely reliant on the inner workings of an individual's faith, although those accounts are beneficial. Inductions need to be made that consider how objects help make up networks of religious relations that consequently feed the contexts of a faith or belief system. I have made attempts to be sure that the results of my inductive reasoning have not

led to empirical truth claims about others, but have, instead, led to theories that express lines of possibilities for understanding the volatile, relational phenomena that take place in the worlds of others.

### *Informants and Interviews*

The majority of the field work was carried out most from between August, 2007 to August, 2008 although subsequent visits carried on after this period. Two fieldwork concentrated visits were undertaken to Spain, while a series of 'day visits' were undertaken to Glastonbury (I live six miles from Glastonbury). I re-visited the shrine of the Virgin in June, 2009, June, 2010, and July, 2011; maintaining a friendship with the shrine steward, the *Santero* and consequently gathering more information about my case study. Further, I have maintained an acquaintance-like friendship with my main Goddess religion devotee (Georgina).

Within the case studies, an initial selection of informants led to further 'connections'. Typical of my developing relational methodology, some of my informants had relationships with others who, after being introduced to me, also became informants. I met some of my informants by going and sitting in the temple, by attending public ceremonies and processions, or by making daily visits to the shrine. These were casual encounters. Sometimes the situations called for a 'signing of consent forms' while others were not appropriately suited to this. Of those who signed consent forms, one Spanish informant wished not to be named. Others said they did not mind being named. Those who did not sign consent forms are not named as they did not consent to being named. Kathy Jones is named because she is a well known public figure and author with regards to the Glastonbury Goddess Temple. I did not interview Jones formally, but I spent time in her company on three different occasions and I have casually conversed with her. Further, I

have both directly translated and paraphrased much of what the informants said in the Spanish case studies for reasons of translation. The translations were carried out by my husband (José) and I, my husband being Spanish and thus a fluent Spanish (and English) speaker. As he was present the interviews, he helped me to clarify and refine the information given to me by the Spanish informants.

In the case of the Virgin of Alcala, at the end of January, 2008 I returned to the shrine and spoke with the *Santero* (his name is Jose Luis but people call him the *Santero*) with an open view to 'conducting proper fieldwork' at and around the shrine of the Virgin. As this was my third visit to the shrine I had paid to the shrine (the first was the initial contact, the second was to camp for the night and participate and observe the procession of the Virgin the following day), the *Santero* remembered me; however, when I produced a consent form to sign, he immediately 'clammed up' and appeared nervous and guarded. He said he would not sign any forms. After I explained in more depth the reason for the form, he rang the village priest and asked for permission to speak with me. The village priest, a man in his late 20s called Father Marco, agreed to meet with me that day, and after that, he gave the *Santero* permission to speak with me. This encounter was strange. This 'formality' put a strain on mine and the *Santero*'s relationship for over two days. Whereas there had been a kind of jovial openness between us before, it seemed like the form ruined everything. I was very worried. He was more cautious in his dealings with me and watched his words carefully. A glimmer of hope returned when he suggested that my husband and I come back the following morning and pick asparagus with him in the surrounding countryside. After seeing how uneasy he was with the digital recorder and my writing notes, I decided the best way to interact with the *Santero* was to put my research equipment to one side and just casually spend time with him. After the asparagus picking day,

the relationship felt restored. The *Santero* began ringing up people in the village who are deeply involved members of the cult of the Virgin, and interviews with the three of the *camaristas*, the women who ritually bath and change the Virgin, were arranged.

The *camaristas* are an elite group of women within the local cult of the Virgin. The word *camarista* literally translated means 'chamber maid'. This is due to the fact that the place where the Virgin sits in the shrine is called the *camara* or 'chamber'. From interviews conducted with three of them in January, 2008, I found that they are chosen local women who exhibit certain virtuous qualities in the community. The three *camaristas* that I met varied in age. One of them, Francisca Jiménez Fernández (called 'Paqui'), was a woman in her 50s. The other, Yolanda Quintero Díaz, was a woman who appeared to be in her mid thirties. She is a mother of two. The third *camarista* who wished not be named, seemingly out of shyness more than concern for the data she would give, appeared to be somewhere in her 40s, but it was difficult to tell for certain. There are roughly eight *camaristas* at any one time. In the past, *camaristas* would have been women who maintained their virginity throughout their lifetimes, i.e. women who are never married and who have remained virgins. The role of *camarista* would have also been passed down through generations to the unmarried women of a family. However, Yolanda told me that contemporarily, that particular aspect of the tradition has lost continuity. Of the three *camaristas* I met, Paqui still lives at home with her mother and has never been married. The others, I am told, are married, and this is contemporarily acceptable.

My being a foreigner seemed to inspire humor and mistrust simultaneously in the Spanish informants. Luckily, my husband came along and was able to explain with local humor, accent and familiar language (the people of Andalusia are renowned for their humorous, playful dispositions), what I was doing and why. Although my Spanish was, as I thought, more than



okay, I took the subtleties and nuances of language and culture for granted. Also, accents vary greatly in Andalusia and country villages often have their own local flavor of language use that many 'outsiders', Spanish or not, have difficulty in understanding. This proved difficult in the beginning and there were misunderstandings, but after revisits, some formal, some friendly, relationships began that are maintained to this day when we visit family in Spain. I followed up my interviews with the *camaristas* with 'thank you' cards.

I initially made contact with the Goddess Temple in Glastonbury in December of 2007 by emailing them through the 'Contact Us' button on the Goddess Temple website. The woman who responded was a priestess of Avalon called Georgina Sirett-Hardie, a woman in her mid 50s. We set up an interview via email. This was the beginning of a long steady flow of interviews with her. This informant gave me permission to email her if I had any questions, and I did when necessary, but took care to say to her that I knew it was her time and that she did not need to speak to me or respond if she was too busy. One day, Georgina did not turn up for our scheduled appointment. She had forgotten about our meeting, but was later very apologetic. I reassured her that it was her who was doing me a favor, not the other way around. After interviews I was often taken into the temple and shown around. I was also given the names and numbers of two others who I might want to speak with, specifically the woman who creates the Goddess figures that go in the temple, and the woman who does the paintings that hang in the temple. The woman who does the paintings that hang in the temple is the only one I spoke with as the other was unavailable.

Apart from the meetings with the *camaristas*, other information came about through my particular relational form of participating and observing. Here I chatted casually to Goddess Pagans and Virgin devotees of both genders and many different ages. However, the Santero and

the Priestess Georgina are my two major points of contact and sources with each case study. With each of these informants, sometimes the conversations were formal, sometimes informal. At times I had a list of printed out questions with me and other times I went causally to see what would come out of the conversations (running off and quickly writing down the information during either 'bathroom breaks' or after).

In the case of the Goddess informant, Georgina, there were times our conversations strayed from the subject matter drastically and we would be sat in the café for two or more hours chatting. I found myself at times using the knowledge that I had gained from being on my own spiritual path when I was younger to relate to Georgina, i.e. I know the language, because it used to be, and still is to some extent, part of my own language. As a researcher, reflexively, I think my greatest blunder with this informant came when I blurted out what I had been desperate to know from the beginning. I asked, 'So, is the Goddess embodied in the figure on the altar, or is this figure a representation'. This, I quickly realized, was a forceful, leading question. The informant stood there looking perplexed for what seemed like a long period of time, and finally she came back with 'embodied.' This answer was what I had hoped for, but my means of retrieving the information could have definitely used some refinement.

### *Participating and Observing as a Guest Researcher*

Participating and observing as a guest researcher has inevitably required much physical activity. Apart from the formal and semi-formal interviews, conducting fieldwork among the devotees and care takers of the shrine and temple has required participations and observations in processions, ceremonies, temple dressings, work and daily activities. I have been invited warmly into the folds of these worlds, or 'ontological phenomena', where I have listened, watched, and

learned. Here, also, I have helped paint and decorate the new Goddess Hall, and I have helped the *Santero* move rocks, water flower beds and pick asparagus while casually conversing about the shrine and other goings on.

During the course of this research I have experienced stirrings and waves of anxiousness in my stomach when I have asked for miracles to be granted, and I have been moved emotionally by encounters with that of the Virgin of Alcala. Yet what has moved me most is that I have been invited, as a guest, to participate with people in their devotion. I have held their hands in circles of ceremony, and I have learned to sing their devotional songs. I have been welcomed into their temples and shrines. Members from each of the two case studies have implied that I am there, not really as a researcher, but because 'she' (the Goddess or the Virgin) brought me there. Two informants have also suggested that I must have a secret, spiritual agenda, and that agenda is to find spiritual fulfillment and to have faith restored, or born anew. However, only rarely did I doubt the reasons why I was there.

Although I did not 'go native', i.e. I did not become Catholic, as might be expected using a relational methodology, I developed a relationship with the Virgin of Alcala which exists long past my fieldwork there. This is because there were honest moments when I felt moved during physical encounters with her (this is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4). Theoretically, the methodological implications of 'going native' would potentially cloud my ability to be a good guest researcher, i.e. I would have developed a sense of over identification with the Virgin and crossed the boundary between 'guest' and 'researcher', becoming an emotionally involved participant/practitioner. In this case the empathy I developed from my relational venture with the Virgin of Alcala proved to help me better understand the relationships that devotees have with

her. My emotional tie with the Virgin is reflected in the passion with which I wrote about her in this thesis.

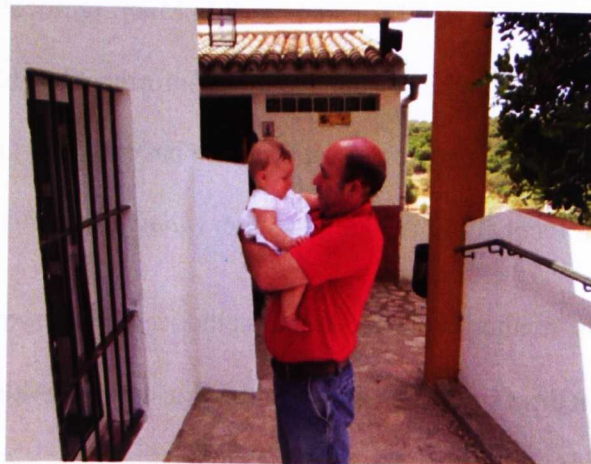
*Eating and Drinking with Informants: Putting theories where the mouth is*

As a guest-researcher, I applied Harvey's guesthood methodology (2003) in my own ways, which included a focus on eating and drinking. Eating and drinking are two of the more pleasant things that all human beings do together and have in common. So what better way to traverse the boundaries of researcher and informant than through food and drink? Both Harvey's guesthood method and my own experiences and time living in Spain with my husband's vocally unrepressed Spanish family have taught me that the dinner table is not only a pleasant place to be because most people enjoy eating, but it is where significant negotiations occur. The dinner table is where things that are important are said. It is where conclusions are drawn, where thoughts are shared, and where plans are finalized. Eating and drinking, as such, are two of the 'great equalizers' of human kind, along with death, birth, sex and bodily functions.

This research method of extending an invitation to dine or drink is applied after initial contact by phone or e-mail is made. It is the middle ground, the initiatory point, or the twilight period where the crucial decision is made. Am I friend or foe? In Maori protocol, am I a potential guest or a potential enemy as I appear on the horizon? Will the informant be able to host me or not? In Western terms, eating and drinking is the closest thing we have to Maori protocol, yet this, too, is also part of later Maori protocol after breathing together (*hongi*) takes place.

I was able to apply this 'method', which is not a method as it comes with relating as a human being, with the *Santero* on three occasions and with the Priestess of Avalon on four. I was also able to eat and drink with the Goddess group after a day's labor. This eating and drinking with

informants was easy to implement with the Spanish case study. As mentioned before, in Spain, conversations, in fact social lives, revolve around food. Hence, time spent with the *Santero* has involved cooking, eating, and drinking. At the end of the asparagus picking day, he swiftly took back a bundle to the shrine (where he lives with his wife and children), and began to make an asparagus Spanish tortilla. I know this was meant to be the other way around, i.e. I invite the informants for food and/or drink to see if I am later given an invitation to come ‘in’; yet it worked out in reverse here. While the *Santero* was cooking the tortilla, the drinks began to flow, and as is the custom during *la comida* (late lunch for us), the drinks were alcoholic. The *Santero* appeared to take a deep delight in introducing me to foods and drinks specific not only to Spain, but to the countryside around Alcala. The wine was made locally; the eggs and the asparagus, we collected ourselves. I felt as though I was eating and drinking the place, the location. Those flavors mixed with the air and the scenery (the shrine is nestled in hills surrounded by countryside and expansive views) gave me a sense of place not experienced before. When I returned to the shrine the following years in the summers of 2009, 2010 and 2011, the *Santero* ‘fed’ my family and I each time. Not only that, he greeted our baby daughter with affection and fatherly advice.



### 3.1 The *Santero* with Lucia

I also had the opportunity to eat and drink with Goddess informants where I invited, and I paid. There was no alcohol, just tea and coffee, and food was taken at a local café, the same café that became our habit for meetings. We had lunch, and we talked through lunch. I noticed how people and their moods change when food arrives and during eating. Also, on the day that I worked at the Goddess Hall doing painting and decorating, I sat around the table with devotees and ate lunch with them while mainly listening to their conversation and sometimes participating. This is a research approach that I will continue to use in future research projects.

## *Chapter 4*

### *The Virgin of Alcala*

This chapter discusses the religious materiality that exists in the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala and the key people involved who make the shrine function 'behind the scenes' or 'day to day'. Here discussed are the roles of the Virgin, performances that take place in relation to her, and what she gives in return to her devotees, i.e. to those members of the cult of the Virgin, the villagers, and those who travel from within Spain and abroad to visit 'her'. My hope is that the colourful materiality of this case study can be conveyed through these written accounts and imagined for something close to what it is: a complex, rich, multi-layered site, riddled with mystery and power.

Before the ethnographic account begins, it is necessary to lay a foundation in terms of the doctrinal and vernacular roles of both materiality and the Virgin Mary in Catholicism. I will also briefly discuss Andalusian specific Catholicism and the effects that the Second Vatican Council had on statue devotion. This will aid in understanding how and why devotion to the Virgin of Alcala is in the stable, continuous and passionate state that it is today.

#### *The Virgin in Catholicism*

Forms of Catholic materiality such as statues and images are referred to as 'devotionals'. They are tools that aid in the devotional act of contemplation. Religious materiality such as relics, icons, the monstrance, altars, robes, candles, images, incense, etc. are favoured amongst Catholics. They are not rejected as, what Marion Bowman called 'distractions' as they would be perceived within most Protestant discourses (although Protestants also engage religious

materiality, but this is an argument destined for another time and place). Statues and images are of particular relational importance to practicing Catholics. McDannell says,

The Catholic Church has a long history of encouraging its members to use images to help maintain and create relationships with Christ and the saints. Images are handled, cherished, prayed to, and even eaten in order to arouse affection and evoke tears (1995:25).

Statues of the saints, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary play the roles of tool-like conduits of devotion that help stimulate and achieve communications with the divine. For example, the Virgin Mary has the power to approach her Son Jesus, who then approaches God the Father. She is venerated and adored specifically for her relationship to Jesus, i.e. she is the mother of the Son of God and her relationship to Jesus is more close to God than that of the saints. Warner writes,

The theology of the Virgin's intercession maintains very strictly that the Virgin does not have the power to grant any boon by herself, but only intercedes with her son, who as God is the only source of salvation. But the powers of mediation attributed to her throughout Christianity are considered sovereign: the son can refuse his mother nothing. So a prayer to Mary, made in a spirit of repentance and resolve, is wonder-working; and men and women gathered together to pray to the Virgin forget the distinction between direct and indirect power (1978: 286).

Arguably, a combination of Mary's human, motherly, divine roles make relationships with her more plausible, more tactile, more interactive, more emotional and more personal. Corporeal images and statues of Mary are key in the largely physical aspect of her devotion.



The dynamic of holiness of icons and relics did not just stir the soul to the contemplation of higher things, they also physically communicated the properties of their subject or owner. Images were alive, and so they could breathe life into the dying (Warner, 1978: 293).

The Virgin Mary's role is and has been a complicated matter throughout church history. For example, the question of Mary's 'purity' continues to puzzle theologians. For this reason she is 'officially' said to have been immaculately conceived, which means she was 'born free of taint of original sin' (Chidester, 2000: 301). Then, as a virgin, she gave birth to Jesus. She maintained her virginity throughout her life. Then, as recent as 1954, Warner tells us that

the dogma of the Assumption, proclaimed by Pius XII...was a logical development from the dogma of the Immaculate Conception: free from original sin, she was dogmatically free from putrefaction in the grave (Warner, 1978: 253).

After being freed from physical decomposition (albeit rather late) Mary's status changed again. In 1954 she was officially proclaimed Queen of Heaven (1978: 116). All of these changes suggest a 'not knowing exactly where to place the Virgin' within official, doctrinal approaches to Mary.

Whereas Catholicism in Spain experienced its own forms of internal and civil disruptions (including being affected by the changes brought about by the Catholic Counter-Reformation and later Vatican II), direct interruptions to Catholicism stemmed mainly from political and secular movements, not from religiously motivated assaults on the Catholic faith, as was the way with the changes incurred through the more aggressive effects of the Protestant Reformation. In contrast to what Marion Bowman referred to in a personal communication as 'interrupted devotion' when discussing the effects that the Reformation had on Catholic England, the Virgin

of Alcala can be said to come from a line of 'continuous devotion'. Spanish Catholics have been venerating, touching, kissing, processing, and adorning statues since Roman Catholicism was superimposed over the indigenous votive practices of the Iberians to statues of their own gods.

### *Second Vatican Council*

In the 1960's (1962-1965) the Second Vatican Council sought to modernize the Church and many attempts were made to reduce Mary's importance on the vernacular level, i.e. through turning Catholic's attention away from statue devotion (of Mary and other saints) with a re focus on personal 'friendships' with Jesus. However, Greeley (2004) asserts that certain groups, apart from the lower clergy and laity, used the changes put in place by Vatican II to remove elements of Catholicism that they did not like, such as the emphasis on Marian devotion. He writes,

The leaders of this secondary revolution banned statues, stained glass windows, votive candles, crucifixes, and representational art from new or remodeled churches. They rejected popular devotions like May crowning, processions, First Communion, incense, classical polyphony, and Gregorian chant. They dismissed the rosary, angels, saints, the souls in purgatory, and Mary the mother of Jesus. They considered these old customs and devotions liturgically or ecumenically or politically incorrect (2004: 82).

Greeley (2004) says that there was never anything written in the changes made by the Second Vatican Council that condemned the use of devotionals. Drawing on Duffy's 1992 book title *The Stripping of the Altars*, he writes,

There was nothing in any of the documents of the Council to justify the stripping of the altars. The Council never said, never even hinted that Catholic churches should be made to look like Protestant churches or Quaker meeting halls (2004: 82).

He continues, 'It certainly did not proclaim that devotion to the Mother of Jesus was no longer appropriate'. The intention of the Second Vatican Council was to modernize the Church, and the devaluing of public images and statues was part of that process, whether theologically supported or not. What does this mean for the status of the Virgin Mary? The editorial statement written in the first volume of *Maria: A Journal of Marian Studies* (2000) says,

approaches to theology and proclamation aiming somehow to accommodate the benefits and challenges of modernity have found Mary an embarrassment and have ended up with a minimalist position about her that reduces her status simply to that of any other human being under God (2000: 6).

Devotees to vernacular statues of Mary, however, defy this. The Virgin in the context in this chapter, for example, is far from an embarrassment. So what roles do the Virgin play at the vernacular level in Spain and in Andalusia specifically? Like other parts of the Mary venerating world, the Virgin is the feminine divine within Catholic Christianity. She serves the needs of her devotees in similar ways to those that which expected of a mother. She is said to listen, she cure illnesses, help with both wanted and unwanted pregnancies, is adorned with jewels and gold, and takes part in rituals and ceremonies.

### *Andalusian Catholicism*

In Andalusia, the materiality surrounding the Virgins (in whatever local form) is immense, and the Virgins are fully engaged by many with passion and *ganas* (desire). Like a network of kinship relations, the greater theological Mary is present in many individual, localized statue forms in the province of Cadiz and greater Andalusia. Famous Virgins of Andalusia are the *Virgin del Rocio* (or Virgin/Madonna of the Dew) from Huelva and the black *Virgin de la Regla*

from Chipiona, and the Virgin of Alcala de los Gazules, among many others. In Spain, statues of the Virgin form a type of sisterhood. Universally they are 'the Virgin' but they are also unique to place and in their abilities. The Virgin of Alcala, for example, is thought to be able to cure infertility, be of particular help in times of accidents, and is able to aid the community of Alcala in times of drought. *La Virgin del Carmen*, also known as the Virgin of the Sea, is the local Virgin of San Fernando (a coastal town). Del Carmen is prayed to regularly on behalf of fishermen, sailors, and others who themselves or their families work near or on the sea.

According to William A. Christian, Jr., statues of saints are found in places of geographical natural importance or difference, i.e. places that stand out such as caves, springs, mountain tops, etc. and that can be seen as 'contact points with the worlds below and above'. He writes,

Throughout Spain they mark critical points in the eco-system-contact points with other worlds. Mountain peaks, springs, and caves seem to be contact points with the worlds below and above; boundary shrines with other earthly worlds. With their periodic devotions at these sites it would seem that the villagers were at once confirming the boundaries of their world, assuring the continuity of the annual cycle of seasons, and attempting, through propitiation or the use of promises, to gain some control or some influence upon the entry of foreign material or foreign power into their world. Since they themselves are not capable of fully regulating their environment, there must be other powers beyond who are capable, and the chapels are located at the most logical transaction points with these powers beyond. Individual promises and individual regular devotions served the same ends for the individual as the village ceremonies did for the village – to influence the course of crises and ensure the normal unfolding of the life process (Christian, 1989: 182).

Shrine placement indicates boundaries from one region to another, from village to village, or cultivated from uncultivated land (1989: 182). This would have certainly been true for the prominent hill top area that boasts the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala. Despite attitudes fostered by the Second Vatican Council (which took their toll in Spain, especially in the more northern regions), for over 400 years the Virgin of Alcala has flourished within an ongoing vibrant cultic movement where displays of passion and physical contact are alive, stable and continuous. According to Boissevain (1992), the effects of the Second Vatican Council led to a different outcome in Andalusia. He writes,

Since the Second Vatican Council, bishops and priests have renewed their opposition to the boisterous cult of the saints in Andalusia. At the same time, many of them are aware of the strength of what they call 'folk Catholicism' and are obliged to condone it. When in 1979 local and regional leaders of the left were elected to positions of power, they publicly promised to respect the celebration of Holy Week as a "manifestation of popular Andalusian culture". The regionalist movement that has emerged in Andalusia since Franco's death regards outdoor religious celebrations as one of the major manifestations of regional culture. Since then the Council of Andalusia and local governments throughout the region have contributed to a revitalization of Holy Week celebrations and the cult of the saints (cf. Driessen 1989:99) by sponsoring festivals they manipulate local and regional consciousness. These three examples suffice to indicate that 'popular religion' has become part of a cultural policy pursued by various power elites.

Intellectuals, politicians, and religious specialists are all involved (1992: 80-81).

However, according to Boissevain, the attempt to secularize Andalusian devotion by making it 'cultural' has had the opposite effect.

During the past decade the socialist government of Spain has reduced the number of religious holidays. In the same period there has been an increase and intensification of pilgrimages, processions, and the cult of the saints in both urban and rural contexts, along with a drastic decline of liturgical practice (cf. Rodriguez Becerra 1982:8) (1992: 82).

It can be concluded from this that when devotions are under threat by either politicians or councils such as Vatican II, the Andalusians retaliated with increased intensity in the face of secularization.

### *The Village of Alcala*

This ethnographic account begins with a description of a physical locale. The village of Alcala de los Gazules (or Alcala de la Sierra) rests on a hill top in the Southern Spanish region of Andalusia, and in the province of Cadiz. Geographically and historically, Alcala is positioned in a strategic, elevated position capable of providing long views that stretch to surrounding territories.



4.1 The village of Alcala de los Gazules, La Sierra, Andalusia, Spain (to the right)

Currently Alcala has a small population of around 5,300 inhabitants (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística*, 2011) and looks much like many of Andalusia's other 'white villages'. It has schools, bars, restaurants, shops, plazas, churches, and countless other establishments that aid in life's day to day happenings.





4.2 The Village of Alcala de los Gazules, La Sierra, Andalusia, Spain

In January, 2008, I spent a week around the village of Alcala. While conducting fieldwork, the *camaristas* that I met introduced me to a local historian of Alcala called Immaculada ('Imna'). She met me at the shrine of the Virgin one afternoon. As we walked around the shrine land together, she pointed out areas of historical interest. She gave me information with regards to both recorded history and legends surrounding the Virgin. She told me that roughly 900 years ago, Alcala was considered a 'precious jewel' that became the point of a great conflict that arose between the Muslims and the Christians. Here, each side claimed governance and divine right over the terrain. She said that the grounds that now belong to the shrine and sanctuary of the local statue of the Virgin is where one of the Muslim/Christian battles took place and that the well that is on these grounds provided the meeting place for the arrival of troops. Prior to the Muslim and Christian conflicts, Alcala went through several other historical occupations from peoples such as the Romans, Visigoths, Vandals, Phoenicians, and indigenous Iberians. What is



now known as 'Alcala' has been inhabited for many centuries and is understood to be (for many reasons) a place of significance both past and present.

### *The Virgin and her Shrine*

The performances that take place in relation to the Virgin of Alcala are complex and many. They are best described as acts resulting from a combination of official doctrine and popular piety in connection with the local folk customs practiced in relation to her uniqueness of place and ties with the village community of Alcala. According to my first meeting with the *Santero*, this statue of the Virgin is particularly powerful in that she is recognized for performing miracles (as mentioned before, especially those concerning infertility, drought, and accidents).

The *Santero's* role is important for this case study and it must be addressed in further detail before this account continues. His relationships can be considered an 'everyday' relationship with the Virgin. From speaking with him, I found that he is responsible for many things such as the security of the complex, answering the telephone, making preparations for events such as children's day visits, processions, weddings and funerals, and welcoming pilgrims and devotees to the shrine. Generally, the *Santero* is responsible for the upkeep of the sanctuary and grounds surrounding the shrine. I have observed him watering plants, moving rocks, or doing whatever needs to be done in relation to maintenance and the shrine. Further, the *Santero* is a man of the country. He grows food for him and his family; he shoots his own game, and generally survives off the land surrounding the shrine. He receives a salary and housing for being in the position of *Santero*. He lives in the sanctuary with his wife (the *Santera*) and their two children. The *Santero* is never permitted to leave the shrine without first making sure that someone is there to take his place, hence he very seldom leaves. His wife works outside the sanctuary, and their children go

to school in the village. One of the pre-requisites for the position is to be of local origin and to be a devotee to the Virgin. In September 2007 he told me that people view him as more than a maintenance or grounds man. They see him as having a special relationship to the Virgin, and for this reason he will often play the role of listener and counsellor to those who bring their hardships and offerings to the shrine. Further, as I have observed, the *Santero* plays the role of a kind of gate keeper to the Virgin (and consequently miracles she can perform), i.e. the *Santero* is responsible for unlocking the door that leads to the chamber of the Virgin where devotees can have physical access to her. He also plays the role of information provider to those who visit the shrine. It is also part of the *Santero*'s job to change the flowers at the base of the statue on a weekly basis, making sure that the Virgin always has fresh flowers.

In January, 2008, the *Santero* and Imna both said that the Virgin of Alcala is known to conduct miracles and that surrounding villages have made attempts to call the Virgin of Alcala their own. From accounts told by Paqui, Yolanda, Imna, my mother-in-law, and an elderly woman passerby who overheard us speaking, I understood that the statue has three origins, all of which are centered upon similar elements: the sudden and unannounced appearance of an unclothed statue in a field overnight, an olive tree, a well, a long journey, two undercover angels, and a shepherd. The stories change depending on who is doing the telling, but they consist of these elements:

Between four to five hundred years ago, a shepherd was in a pasture around where the shrine now stands. He was herding his sheep. In the evening he fell asleep under an olive tree. When he awoke, he found an unclothed wooden 'doll' sat next to him. Bewildered, he tried to get rid of it. The next morning the shepherd awoke to the presence of the statue under the tree for the second time, so he built a fire and put the wooden statue in it.

Yet again, the following morning the statue was found to have returned unscathed. In his anger and confusion, the shepherd hit the statue in the head with his staff. This part of the story accounts for the mild cross eyed look of the statue. Finally, the shepherd went and sought out the local priest. The priest, after hearing the story and seeing the statue, proclaimed it to be that of the Virgin Mary and a miraculous happening, hence the constructing of a shrine dedicated to the statue in that place.

Another story goes as follows:

The locals in the village decided they needed a statue of the Virgin Mary (or perhaps they needed a new one). Two men were sent with money to Malaga to see someone who could help. They had only been walking for one day when, in Tarifa, they encountered someone who gave them a statue – the same statue that resides in the shrine today.

A further story in relation to the shrine and the two angels goes as follows:

Two men came to help build the shrine of the Virgin. The locals brought the men food and water that would last for a few days so that the men would have enough to eat and drink. When some of the locals went turned back up at the site where the shrine was to be built, the shrine was complete and the food and water had not been touched. For this reason, according to the story, the two builders were angels disguised as men.

The *Santero* and *Imna* agree that the statue is at least 400 years old, and both say that it could be much older. Community identities of both the Virgin and the local devotees are interconnected, each giving strength and importance to the other. William A. Christian writes,

With this analogy the symbolic role of Mary as village patron becomes a very important practical one. She is a significant factor in binding the villagers together as member of the same family. Just as the extended family stays together as long as the widowed matriarch is still alive and active, so the village stays together under the continued activity of a powerful image. This is how the very essence of the village as home can come to be bound up in a revered image (1989: 175).

Approximately five kilometres from the village of Alcala, this Baroque-style shrine is over 400 years old and is accessed through a long open road that runs through the middle of large olive grove.



4.3 This is an aerial image of the shrine and sanctuary of the Virgin of Alcala



The complexity, size and adornment of the sanctuary (also known as the *ermita de Nuestra Señora de los Santos*) are testimony to her local, regional, national and international fame. From this image, the shrine within the complex can be seen. It is the right side of the complex with the two raised and pointed rooftops. Further, the wall façade that houses the shrine bells indicates the main shrine entrance. Although this is the ‘main entrance’, it is rarely used. As indicated further on, the shrine is typically accessed through the patio courtyard.



4.4 The front entrance to the shrine

There are, in fact, three entrances to the actual shrine, and two entrances to the main complex.

Once at the complex, one of the first things I noticed that there were many animals around. There were several dogs and cats, and all had little offspring running around. When I asked the *Santero* about this, he said ‘This is a sanctuary for everyone’, and told me that he feeds the animals and takes care of them. To get to the actual shrine it is necessary to pass through an

archway that takes you into a tiled patio area. Above the door, a painted tile plaque reads ‘Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus’.



Figure 4.5 The entrance to the shrine complex

In this area, to one side, there is a small souvenir shop dedicated to the Virgin, i.e. everything inside is Virgin of Alcala materiality that has been *bendicido*, or blessed. There are statues, rosaries, fans, pictures, prints, amulets, medals, plaques, bells, salt and pepper shakers, milk jugs, painted tiles, painted plates, clocks, mugs, flags, candles, jewellery, and more, all bearing the image of the Virgin of Alcala.



4.6 Inside the souvenir shop of the shrine

From the same patio area, another archway is passed through that takes you into the large central courtyard typical of Spanish architecture where open air ‘patios’ are central to the building.



4.7 The patio



Here, plants, flowers and decorative tiles dress the inner sanctuary where rooms with balconies house visitors, pilgrims, and members of the community who come and stay during *romerías*, pilgrimage, and other events. The rooms are also the subject of a yearly raffle in which people buy tickets and whoever has the winning tickets will be able to occupy the rooms during the week of the Virgin's birthday (which is the large fiesta and annual procession that takes place around the grounds of the shrine). The shrine appears to be most frequently entered through the two dark heavy doors in the corner right hand side of the central patio courtyard.



4.8 The entrance to the shrine part of the complex

Upon entering the shrine, the first thing that struck me was the ornate, colorful decoration. Then, the next noticeable thing is that it is cool, dimly lit, and smells strongly of a mixture of frankincense, must, and flowers. The shrine has marble floors and a dome-like painted ceiling.





4.9 The Virgin in her Shrine

The statue of the Virgin is elevated roughly 12 feet off ground level. She sits in another, higher chamber that has her facing out into the shrine. She is framed and displayed within a large arch, and she is sometimes illuminated beneath what appear to be large white carnival light bulbs. Some of the bulbs work and others do not, while there are sockets without any bulbs at all.

Most of the paintings on the dome shaped ceiling are rubbed out and faded. A large chandelier hangs from the centre of the larger dome-like structure. The mouldings are also chipping in places. This faded, antique look is shared by most of the pictures, paintings, and statues found within the shrine. One can see hundreds of *ex votos* along the walls, and pews are set in rows before the altar of the shrine which sits a step above ground level. *Ex votos* are, according to McDannell, 'physical expressions of thanks for a cure or divine help' (1995: 152).

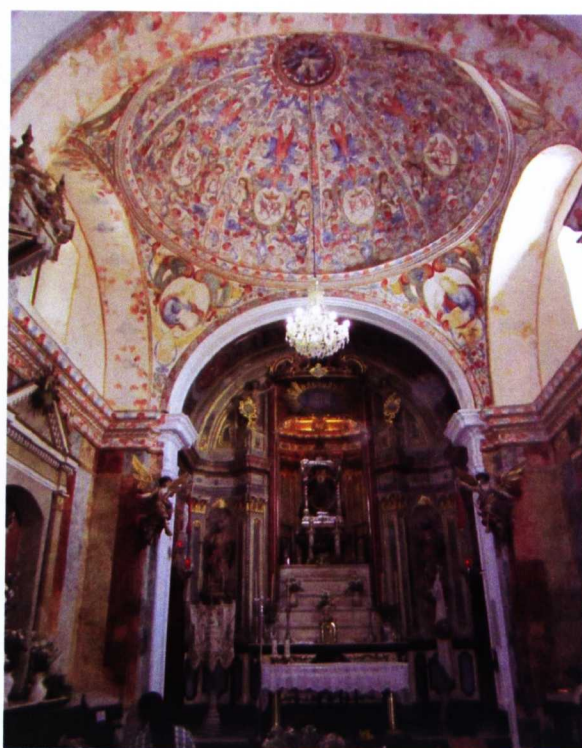


4.10 The long view of the shrine illustrating the ex votos and domed ceiling

#### *The Original Shrine*

On my June, 2010 visit, the *Santero* told me that the complex as it stands now is built around an older, original shrine. He is not certain about the age of the original shrine, but speculates that it could be from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The following picture shows the original part of the shrine around which the rest of the complex has been built. From the aerial photo, this would be the front, right side of the building with the second raised/pointed rooftop.





4.11 The original shrine around which the rest of the complex was built

The older part of the shrine is distinguished from the rest of the shrine because of the dome-like structure. The *Santero* told me that the statue would have originally sat where the altar is now placed (with the white table cloth). The shrine and complex as it stands now was built in the 1800s, the original part being much older, but as indicated before, the age of the original part of the shrine is speculative. The *Santero* speculates that it is as old as when the Virgin first ‘appeared’ on the land where the shrine now stands, probably in the 1400s. He also says that the Virgin’s ‘appearance’ was actually a ‘reappearance’. In a casual conversation during my most recent visit in July, 2011, the *Santero* told me that the Virgin had been buried by early priests during the Muslim invasions and was unearthed once peace had been restored and Spain was once again under Catholic rule. This would have been when this first part of the shrine was built.

The altar sits at the centre of the shrine on ground level. This is where venerative flowers are placed. These are funded by the organising body responsible for the details of the Virgin’s care

called the *hermandad*, which literally translated means ‘fraternity’ or ‘brotherhood’ (I will discuss this further on in this chapter). On the floor in front of the altar there are six white buckets filled with fresh water daily that are there to receive the bouquets of flowers brought by devotees to the shrine.



4.12 The two doors either side of the altar.

On either side of the elevated chamber that houses the Virgin and on ground level there are two sets of double wooden doors shrouded by thick red velvet curtains that lead to white marble staircases that take one up and into the Virgin’s chamber. The right hand staircase is the passage most often used.





4.13 The chamber of the Virgin

Once in the inner chamber, one can see that the Virgin stands on an ornate pedestal that raises her roughly four feet off of the floor. One can see that it is round, has stained glass windows, and another, high, painted dome ceiling where the faces of cherubs come out of a mixture of painted cloud and blue sky. Entering the chamber allows one to access the back of the Virgin and her mantle/robe, while her front faces outward to the shrine.

As illustrated, the Virgin sits within a *templete* (or small temple) of silver. The Virgin permanently resides, even during processions, in her *templete*. On the top of the *templete* there is a gold miniature and elongated angelic figure blowing a trumpet toward the heavens. At the base of the *templete* at feet level of the statue, there is a large crescent moon. Warner tells us that the symbol of the moon is a symbol of fertility which,

Has been the most constant attribute of female divinities in the western world, and was taken over by the Virgin Mary because of ancient beliefs about its functions and role, which Christianity inherited (Warner, 1978: 256).

The chamber of the Virgin is the place where one can have physical contact with her and at the *Santero*'s discretion.



Figure 4.14 The Virgin in her chamber, facing out into the shrine

The Virgin is roughly three feet tall, and has fine, delicate looking, classically European features that are framed in gold. By this I mean she has a long narrow face, a small nose and



pronounced, yet small lips. Her eyes are painted brown without indication of the presence of eyelids.



4.15 The Virgin up close

This supports the *Santero*'s claim in January 2008 that 'she never sleeps', making her eyes appear wide open and giving her the appearance of a 'gaze'. Her 'skin' is painted fair. She holds a sceptre in one hand, and a smaller statue of the baby Jesus (also crowned and robed) in the other. This statue of Jesus is tiny in comparison with the statue of the Virgin, and is probably no larger than eight inches in height, yet his appearance is that of a miniature crowned and robed toddler. The small Jesus is dressed in coordination with the Virgin, holds a sceptre in one hand and a *globus cruciger* in the other. She also wears a large crown of gold.

On a day visit in January 2008, the *Santero* told me that he often goes into the chamber and chats with the Virgin about the hurt and pain in the world. He told me that 'She [the Virgin] has the power to help heal both individuals and the world situation'. On my last visit he told me that he takes all of his troubles to her. He then said 'Sometimes the Virgin gets angry with me and punishes me for doing something as simple as killing a mosquito and when I tell the *Santera* [his wife] these things, she tells me that I am crazy'. Sometimes he speaks of how her face changes, or how he sees her move. He also says that sometimes she is angry and other times she radiates with joy. The *Santero* speaks about the statue as a living, animate, being. In September 2007, when he has been in the chamber with me, he said 'Now touch this side of her robe and look how her face looks content.' Then he will take me around to the other side of the statue and say, 'Now touch this side of her robe, and look at how she looks more serious'. According to Warner, 'Mary and the saints are begged to pray for us and not to act directly and grant the ultimate object of the prayer' (1978: 288). This differs from accounts told to me by the *Santero*. He says 'she is so powerful that she can perform miracles and answer prayers, and if she does not want something to happen, then it will not happen'.

Another statue in the shrine that is particularly popular with pilgrims is a small statue of the infant Jesus (about 18 inches in height). Enclosed in a protective glass case on the ground level, he sits on a table to right of the Virgin. On one arm hangs a silver basket, and in the other hand he holds a pearlescent *globus cruciger*. This Jesus is kept under a glass box-like container and is dressed in formal baby clothes: a white satin gown with ruffles, white socks, and silver shoes.





4.16 The fertility Jesus

This statue is carved wood. His features are more doll-like than that of what is usually associated with the baby Jesus, i.e. the hair and face is painted on. People that come to the shrine seeking the Virgin's help with infertility or other problems with conception will request that the glass case is removed so that they can tug on the infant Jesus' genital region. The *Santero* told me that a person has give *dos tirones de la pichita* ('two tugs on the penis') to ensure conception. According to one of my informants, a friend of mine and my husband's called 'Mariano', a male in his early 30's, he went to the shrine, tugged on the penis of the statue, and asked for a child. Mariano said '*Funcionó*' (it worked). He pointed to his seven year old daughter.

This genital region is covered by a pair of small underpants, and although I normally have no problem in fully engaging in participant observation in all of its forms, this is one engagement that I chose to miss out. Hence, I do not know how this statue is physically made (I question

myself now wondering if I didn't want to engage in this act because of embarrassment or because I was afraid that it might work). What I do know is that on my June, 2009 visit, the baby Jesus was in the village of Alcala being restored. The *Santero* told me that this is due to its popularity and the fact that years of physical contact have taken their toll. It is also for this reason that the baby Jesus statue now sits within a glass case. In the past he was open to the public, but now the *Santero* can have more control over who touches it and how. Further, the statue of the infant is loaded down with gold baby jewellery (rings, bracelets and necklaces) and things like baby dummies, baby pictures, and knitted or bought baby shoes that are often found both on and around this little statue. These offerings have been brought by people who have conceived a child and attribute the child's conception to a visit to the shrine and a tug at the genitals of the baby Jesus. It can be suggested from this last that the Virgin and the Jesus work together in terms of fertility.

On my July, 2010 visit, I was shown another chamber that I never knew existed. It is partially underground and sits below the elevated chamber of the virgin. This room houses the *ex votos* left by children and *ex votos* dedicated to children. The *Santero* also showed me one wall lined with boxes full of devotions, drawings, finger paintings, and other children's things. This smaller sanctuary is simple with white walls lined with paintings, pictures and rosaries. There were also several framed locks of hair hanging on these walls, more than in the main part of the shrine. Two of the 'locks' of hair were not actually 'locks' but substantial long thick braids. One them was salt and pepper in color (silver and black) and the other was a dark reddish brown. When I pointed at them and looked at the *Santero*, he said '*prometido*' (promised). The *Santero* indicated (and I paraphrase here because I did not have my digital recorder present) that there is simply not enough room to display all of the devotionals left at the shrine. In an adjoining chamber there is a

huge wardrobe full of the robes used by the priests and a large antique desk, chairs, and tray holding a bottle of sherry. This part of the shrine is not usually accessed by the public and I felt privileged to be allowed entry.

It must be clarified at this point that the shrine of the Virgin is not a church. It is a shrine and sanctuary dedicated specifically to the Virgin. As will be discussed further on with regards to property and revenue, the Virgin and her shrine generate their own economies independent of the local church. The church that is meant to ‘correspond’ to the shrine is called ‘La Iglesia de la Victoria’ and it sits in the village of Alcala. The parish priest, Father Marco, officiates at ceremonies, rituals, and the summer masses that take place within the shrine, while officiating at his own church within the parish.



4.17 Inside La Iglesia de la Victoria with the miniature Virgin of Alcala to the right hand side

Further, inside the church there resides a miniature statue of the Virgin of Alcala. This 'mini-Virgin of Alcala' (seen to right hand side of this image) indicates a connection between the shrine of the Virgin and La Iglesia de la Victoria. According to Father Marco, more people attend mass in the church during the winter than in the summer months.

According to the *Santero*, those devotees who visit the shrine do not necessarily have an affinity with the church, or even Catholicism. On my latest visit in July, 2011, he said: 'When some people come to see the Virgin and see that mass is going on, they turn around and leave. The thing of the Virgin doesn't necessarily have anything to do with the church'. In other words, many, but not all, Virgin devotees are often on a different 'trajectory' to those who regularly attend mass. When I asked him about the social classes of people who come to visit the Virgin, he said '*Hay de todo*' (There is every type of person). Further, when I asked him about gender (whether there more women than men, or vice verse) he said '*Es igual*' (It's the same). Then 'There are even atheists who come to see the Virgin'. Paraphrased, he said 'the Virgin is a thing of generations' and said that I am now a devotee of the Virgin, too. When I asked why he thinks that, he said 'you keep coming back'.

When I asked the *Santero* about other shrines in the area he told me that 'the shrine most similar to this one is the one in Vejer'. Vejer de la Fronterra is another Andalusian hilltop village roughly 40 kilometres from the village of Alcala. But, he emphasised, '*esta es unica!*' (this one is unique!). When I asked how, exactly, is this shrine different, he replied '*No hay otra virgen como ella*' (there is no other Virgin like her). He said (to paraphrase) 'his' Virgin was crowned 'the Virgin of the Saints' which means that her sovereignty is acknowledged by the Rome. Details of this will be discussed in the section of this chapter called 'The Coronation'. He then told me about the significance of the *ex votos*, how the shrine is a 'living record' of the lives of



people, past and present. He said that some people return to the shrine to collect family photos that were left there in cases such as needing one for a driving license. The *Santero* said that he points to the correct box, which will be labelled and dated, and tells them to go through the pictures and look for their own.

When I researched information about the *ermita* at Vejer in July, 2011, I saw that it is dedicated to La Señora de la Oliva. I did not visit this shrine physically as I did not have transportation (and a baby in tow), but from the images I found on the website

[http://cadizpedia.wikanda.es/wiki/Ermita\\_de\\_Nuestra\\_Se%C3%B1ora\\_de\\_la\\_Oliva\\_\(Vejer\\_de\\_la\\_Frontera\)](http://cadizpedia.wikanda.es/wiki/Ermita_de_Nuestra_Se%C3%B1ora_de_la_Oliva_(Vejer_de_la_Frontera)), I discovered that, this shrine, although the complex is a building of smaller but similar architectural style, this shrine does not have *ex votos* and is much less ornate than that of the Virgin of Alcala. There are, however similarities. La Señora de la Oliva occupies a central, elevated position in the shrine and there are flowers in buckets on the floor at the altar below. The statue of this Virgin appears to be much larger than the Virgin of Alcala. Clearly, I did not do research in terms of the similarities of the demographics, devotees and venerative performances/offerings that take place between La Señora de la Oliva and the Virgin of Alcala, but this would be a worthwhile undertaking for future investigations.

### *She/Her*

During my time spent with some of the devotees of the Virgin, especially during my January, 2008 trip, I began to realize that the statue is referred to as *ella* or 'her'. In further dealings with the statue and after increased familiarity, I also began to refer to the statue as 'her'. Now it seems there is no other appropriate way to refer to the Virgin of Alcala. Calling her 'the statue' does not seem suitable or justifiable. This is due in part to the fact that those who love her and dedicate

their time to her refer to her in this loving, human-like way. Therefore, I refer to the statue of the Virgin of Alcala as 'her', only sometimes referring to her as 'the statue' when I need to discuss her physical components (although those form part of 'her', too). However, my husband, a proclaimed agnostic, also refers to the statue as *ella*. He said 'that's the way it is around here'; although he says he thinks that *ella* is just a statue. He insists this is normal in Andalusia and that to refer to the statue as *ella* is cultural and not particularly dependent on religious faith. Hence, there is also the possibility of a cultural factor that influences how people refer to statues of Mary in Andalusia.

### *Materiality and the Virgin of Alcala*

Since religious materiality is by definition anything that can be interpreted by and related to through the senses, i.e. things that are touched, smelled, felt, heard, tasted or experienced in sensuous ways, then the shrine, the statue, the sanctuary, and all of its contents and surrounding territories are set are all part of the religious materiality that forms part of the cult of the Virgin of Alcala. A single visit to the shrine can potentially fill the senses with a million colourful possibilities; and for the researcher, the territory surrounding the shrine and all of its related stories and happenings is expansive enough to fill a second thesis. However, the focuses of this chapter are the statue and offerings. This includes issues of display, composition, restoration, adornment, dressing, and the materiality left as offerings within the shrine. This also includes the performances and acts of veneration that take place therein.

Both Father Marco and the *Santero* informed me, on different occasions, that the Virgin of Alcala's shrine, sanctuary, and surrounding territories are literally in her name, i.e. 'The Virgin of Alcala de los Gazules' is what one will find on the property deeds, and this is one of the ways in which the Virgin of Alcala is personified. Those responsible for her affairs are an organized

body consisting of over 2,000 members called the *hermandad*. The building used by the *hermandad* to house their offices, the Virgin's monies, jewels, gold, mantles, and numerous other Virgin-related objects are also owned by the Virgin. The *hermandad* is responsible for organizing the processions (*romerías*) and other events that take place on sanctuary ground. The Virgin is the hostess. For example, many activities for children are hosted at the *ermita* and paid for by the Virgin. The Virgin of Alcala is also the *patrona* and protectress of the village. She is processed in the village in times of distress, drought, or other disasters, and this has nothing to do with liturgy. Further, in a formal interview with Father Marco in January, 2008, he told me that 'When the Virgin has to be sent away for restoration, the villagers get upset and kick up a fuss until she gets returned'. This is why, Father Marco said, that several members of the cult of the Virgin are taking courses in restoration so that they can restore the Virgin without her having to leave her shrine.

#### *Offerings (a testimony to healing)*

During each fieldwork visit that I undertook, the Santero reiterated the fact that the Virgin is petitioned for help with varying problems such as economic hardship, infertility, sicknesses, family troubles, or offered simple devotion or given thanks for a miracle or answered prayer. This healing function can be seen all throughout the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala and in the forms of the offerings left there, mainly through *ex votos*. Some of the *ex votos* are contemporary, while others are much older, dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.



4.18 *Ex voto* depicting child's survival of a fall, giving thanks to the Virgin



4.19 Contemporary *ex voto* in the shrine



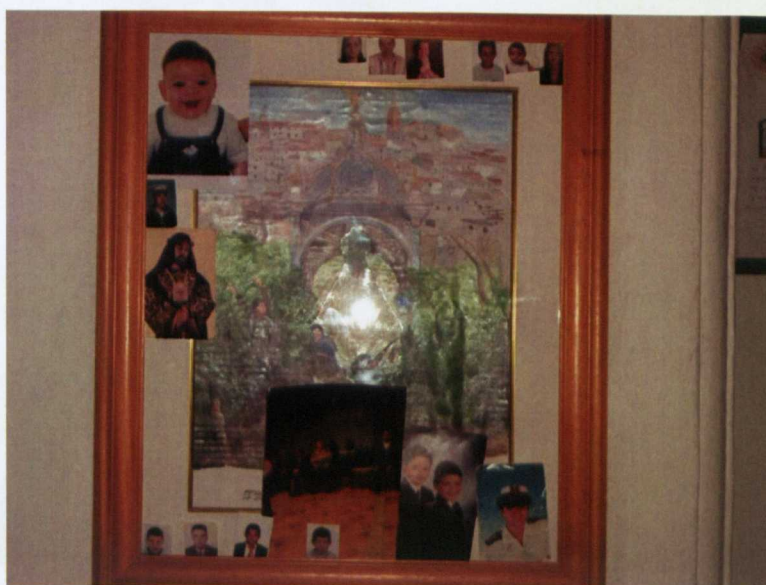


4.20 *Ex voto* dated 1817



4.21 *Ex voto* depicting man surviving execution, 1815

Here, material offerings and promises help to facilitate relationships with the statue. In my visits to the shrine, by taking field notes and photographs, I documented offerings such as: framed locks of hair which hang on the walls of the shrine, and photos of loved ones placed in frames or in the corners of the frames of *ex votos* which have been made or given by a family member.



4.22 *Ex voto* depicting family pictures

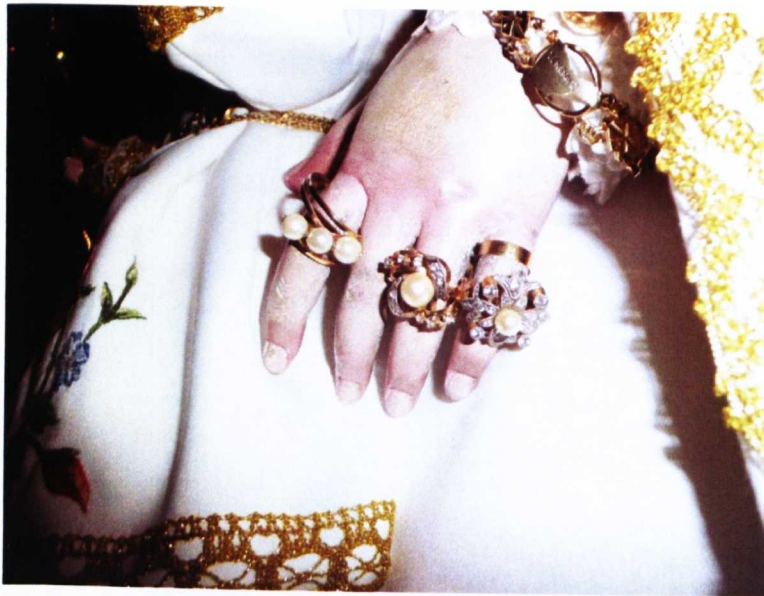
Economically valuable objects such as gold and silver jewelry such as rings, necklaces, and bracelets can also be seen on the statue. From this I observed that objects offered to the Virgin vary in materials and are extremely personal and of sentimental value, valuable through the lens of normative Western economic value systems, or both.

Through both observation and explanations given by the *Santero* I also documented in my field notes that offerings can take the form of an abundance of seasonal flowers, plants, money left on offering plates, and jewelry bought especially for the Virgin. The *Santero* told me that the rings offered to the Virgin are ‘placed on her fingers and changed weekly so that every piece has some time on her hands’. He said that there is a ‘back log’ of jewelry that must be placed on the



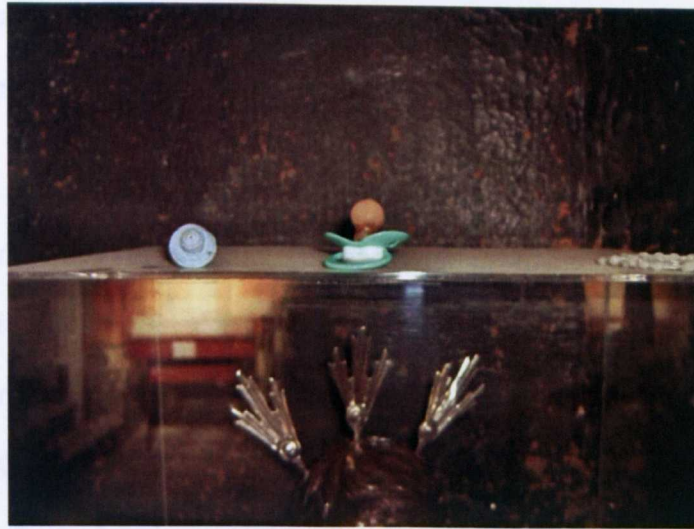
Virgin. From this I gathered that he meant on her fingers, around her neck, and on her wrists.

The Santero said 'There is too much jewellery to put on the Virgin and not enough time'. On my June, 2009 visit to the shrine I saw that the finger of the detailed hands of the virgin, had one or more ring placed on them. There were also several bracelets hanging from her wrists.



4.23 Offerings of rings and jewelry on the Virgin's hand

I also documented (through field notes and photographs) offerings such as rosary beads, candles, cloth cut from the clothes of loved ones, and written petitions placed under the feet of the statue. On my January 2008 visit there were baby dummies, baby jewelry, and baby shoes left in the shrine as offerings given for prayers answered with regards to fertility.



4.24 Offering of a baby dummy on top of the fertility Jesus' glass case

Framed military medals are also common shrine inhabitants. Examples of this can be seen from the image below on the lower left hand side.



4.25 *Ex votos* in the shrine

The shrine of the Virgin of Alcala is filled with different forms of artistry that graphically depict the actual accidents or tragedies that occurred which called for the Virgin's intervention. In this Virgin's shrine, *ex votos* line the walls.

Sometimes offerings are practical. Materials, time and labor are sometimes volunteered as offerings. I am told by the *Santero* that people offer what they have to offer, including skills. For example, if a person is a builder, he will offer his labor. If a person owns a ship he will offer it to the service of the Virgin. If a person is a farmer, he or she will offer a cow. On my visit to the shrine one afternoon, a delivery of stone was made which turned out to be the materials to construct a new patio for the sanctuary, a promise made by a local tradesman that if the Virgin healed his wife, he would donate the stone to make a new patio floor. On my January 2008 visit, the *Santero* told me that a new roof was also recently donated as an offering to the shrine, and that some of the laborers of the village will donate their time to putting it on. As will be discussed in the case of the Goddess, a form of petition by prayer is practiced with the same, exemplary, reciprocal phrase, 'If you do this for me, I will 'x,y,z' for you or your shrine'.

### *The Coronation*

In January, 2008 both the *Santero* and Father Marco told me that the Virgin of Alcala was coroneted in 1990 and acknowledged by the Vatican as 'the Virgin of the Saints'. The *Santero* told me that all of the other statues of the Virgin Mary in the Province of Cadiz were physically and literally brought to Alcala's shrine to witness her crowning and placed at her feet. The *Santero* indicated that this gesture signified her superiority to other statues of the Virgin Mary in the province. He also told me that getting the Virgin crowned and acknowledged took a lot of hard work, yet *she* did it. The Virgin is responsible for getting herself to the position of being



crowned. It is also interesting to note that the content of the Virgin's crown is melted down gold from the jewellery given as offerings to the statue from the devotee parishioners of Alcala.

Interviews with the *Santero* and Father Marco revealed that much of the jewellery on the body of the Virgin is heirlooms and other pieces of sentimental value. According to Orsi's account of the Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street, when the Vatican 'crowns' a statue of Mary, 'The crown is a symbol of papal power, the authority of Rome, and of a particular kind of Catholicism'. He tells that this type of event has 'both local and international context' (1985:64). This can be applied to the statue of the Virgin of Alcala. The contents of the crown help create closer links between the Virgin, Rome, and her community of devotees, i.e. the vernacular and the doctrinal are bridged.



4.26 Illustration of the crown and gold framed face of the Virgin

*Display*

The Virgin of Alcala is displayed in a way that is conducive to the reception of physical touch and contact. Her positioning in the extended, yet reachable, upper chamber demonstrate her power and authority. The mantles are touched, and although a sign is up in the chamber that asks devotees not to kiss the cloth, from the lipstick stains on the Virgin's mantle (which was cream coloured when I was there June, 2009) it is obvious that many do it anyway. In any case, this Virgin's chamber is designed for company. In the chamber there are window seats for people who come with relatives and/or friends to wait their turn at being able to put their head under the back of the mantle and ask for a miracle, or whatever it is that they need.

The Virgin's robes are one of the major foci of performance in the shrine. In the chamber, her mantle, which is said to have miraculous properties, can be touched while one asks for a miracle, prays to the Virgin, or asks for a blessing. The devotee puts the train of the Virgin's mantle over his or her head.



4.27 Devotee beneath the back of the Virgin's mantle

This is the moment when objects such as jewellery, photos, or prayer requests small pieces of paper are left in contact with the 'body' of the Virgin, particularly under her feet. This is also one of the most physically intimate of moments that one can share with the virgin. I have observed devotees cry upon first entry to the shrine and upon coming out from under the back of the Virgin's robe. Although I have made it very clear to the *Santero* that I am not Catholic, at one point during the fieldwork visit of January, 2008 (when I was focused on questioning him), he urged me to 'participate' by placing my head under the back of the Virgin's mantle and asking for a 'miracle'. Under the mantle, the world is dark and smells of sweet must, yet it was still possible to make out the little pieces of paper and photos that have been placed under the feet of the statue. Being somewhat emotionally affected by this experience, and coupled with accounts from devotees, I can better understand how material engagements with the statue make her 'real' for those that love her. In the moments of touch and physical engagement, this 'thing' (the Virgin of Alcala) is a subject of devotion. I found her to be is personal and approachable.

During the January 2008 interview with Father Marco, I asked if the mantles could be powerful when they were not on the 'body' of the Virgin. This was an attempt to better understand the significance of the Virgin's robes for this religiosity. Father Marco replied that the robes are 'only powerful once they are placed on the statue'. However, before any mantle is placed on the statue of the Virgin, the priest said that it must be ritually blessed. According to a female devotee informant in her late twenties called Mayca (my sister-in-law), she took her newborn son to the shrine on a day visit. She told me that Father Marco was there and he offered to '*pasar el bebe de abajo del manto de la virgen*' (pass the baby below the mantle of the Virgin). Father Marco performed this act in order to bless the baby. Further, on my last visit to the shrine in July, 2011, my mother-in-law 'introduced' our baby daughter Lucia to the Virgin by



placing herself and Lucia under the Virgin's mantle. As will be discussed later, the importance of the Virgin's mantles can also be seen in the rites that surround the changing of her robes.

### *Dressing the Virgin*

It is difficult to begin this discussion of the how the Virgin is dressed and changed without also engaging a discussion of the varying roles in operation in the shrine complex, i.e. the parts of the facilitators is equally telling and important to this ethnography as the devotions. Within this complex there are those who 'set the stage' for devotion, members of the cult of the Virgin who belong to the *hermandad*. There is a hierarchy within the *hermandad* and the cult of the Virgin. I have identified three of the most significant roles within the *hermandad* that facilitate the decisions, dressings, daily life, and survival of devotion for the Virgin and her shrine, who is the epicenter of all of this activity. These are the role of the priest, the roles of the *camaristas*, and the role of the *Santero*. These roles must be addressed and outlined in order to understand the attitudes, devotion, treatment, relationships and display of the Virgin.

### *The Parish Priest*

Father Marco is the person responsible for making decisions regarding almost every aspect of the Virgin's existence in the shrine. He is a young priest, appears to be in his mid-twenties, and is from Cadiz, moving to Alcala to fill the role as parish priest. Father Marco told me that he is responsible for choosing what colour of mantle the Virgin will wear in correlation with the liturgical year and for which processions. Generally, the statue is changed six times a year and in loose correlation with Lent, the Ascension, the Assumption, and the Conception (*Immaculada*). Her mantles are also changed before any other type of non-liturgical procession whether it is for her most famous procession in celebration of birthday in September, or when she is needed by

the village in times of crisis (which still occur). In the autumn and winter months of the year the Virgin is dressed in darker colours such as navy blues and reds, and in the spring and summer, she is dressed in lighter colours such as teal greens, whites, gold, and so on. On my June, 2009 visit, the Virgin was dressed in a brand new mantle that had been donated by a convent. It is cream coloured and embroidered with colourful flowers in a traditional Southern Spanish design. Father Marco told me that he holds special masses to bless the mantles both when they are taken out of storage from the *hermandad*, and when a new one is made and donated as an offering.

Before I interviewed Father Marco, I had already been told by both the *Santero* and the *camaristas* that there are taboos surrounding the dressing and changing of the Virgin, and that nobody apart from the *camaristas* knows how she is composed beneath her robes. Hence, I did not dare enquire about the statue's unseen physicality for fear of being out of line or rude (although it is a major concern of my research to know how religious objects are made and of what material). What is interesting is that the priest volunteered this information without any form of leading or provocation. During our conversation Father Marco repeatedly referred to the Virgin as the *imagen*, or image. He then began to tell me that the statue is no more than an image, and that 'the people of the village are crazy about her'. With this statement he made a dismissive gesture with his hand. He then proceeded to tell me (again without the slightest provocation) that the statue is made of painted cedar with iron support rods that has ball joints in the arms to facilitate gesture making. He also said it is difficult in terms of restoration to upkeep and maintain 'these images' due to their antiquity and delicacy. Further, the priest told me how much revenue the statue brings to Alcala yearly, saying that the shrine brings in over 36,000 euro a year in donations and revenue from her cattle and other farmlands. He also spoke of all of the gold, silver, and valuable possessions owned by the statue that stays in the *hermandad*. Father

Marco's role appears to be that of someone who manages the devotees who set the stage for the devotional rites and practices that take place in relation to the Virgin.

### *The Camaristas*

The role of the *camarista* is interesting because it is the most intimate role within the *hermandad* and the cult of the Virgin. Their job is to clean the statue-body and change the mantle of the virgin in accordance with the liturgical year, seasons, or whenever Father Marco tells them to. Once the priest has chosen the colour, the *camaristas* have the freedom to decide amongst themselves which mantle and tone of that chosen colour she will wear (the Virgin has many mantles of varying colours and tones, some of which are up to 400 years of age and need proper care and occasional restoration). According to the *Santero*, only women can have the role of *camarista* because the modesty of the Virgin must be protected at all times. She can never be seen disrobed by a man. This is one of the greatest taboos in the village with regards to 'their' Virgin, and there are several myths that circulate about what exactly goes on when the Virgin is being changed in that secret way. Even the *Santero*, the person in the most constant contact with the Virgin, is not allowed to see her without her mantles. For that matter, the taboo is such that, according to the *Santero*, all of the shrine's security cameras are turned off, the doors are bolted shut, and the shrine is closed down for the day.

As mentioned in the methodology, I had the honour of formally interviewing and recording three *camaristas* on my last visit to Alcala about their experiences with the Virgin. I was told from the beginning of the interviews that there are things to do with the Virgin that are secret and that they cannot tell me, such as how the statue is made beneath her petticoats. They did, however, tell me she wore handmade white undergarments that they washed and ironed, but

anymore than that is out of bounds for an outsider. The *Santero* had told me that there was a kind of hierarchy within the *camaristas* but when I asked the ones that I met about this, they said this is not true. They reiterated the fact that it is taboo for someone outside of the *camaristas* to know anything about the statue's body, especially a man. Yet the *camaristas* were happy to tell me about their intimate interactions with the statue during her ritual changing and washing. They each told me different accounts of their encounters with the Virgin, but what they all had in common was that they sing devotional songs to her during the process (of which they sang for me during the interview to give me an example). They also each said that they speak to the Virgin and the baby Jesus. Paqui said that they say things such as '*Que guapa estas hoy!*' (Aren't you beautiful today!) The baby Jesus that the Virgin holds is also changed in this process. So when changing the statue of the baby, Paqui says things such as 'Hold still and stop squirming, son! How can I change you if you keep moving?'

Yolanda told me that she goes into a trance-like state during the process whereby hours can pass and it will feel like 20 minutes. Paqui and the one who wished not to be named nodded their heads in agreement. All three women told me that the experience is beautiful for them and extremely feminine and intimate. Yolanda said 'The experience is very intimate and feminine, and very special, you can't explain it'. Paqui told me that three different *camaristas* have seen a tear on the Virgin's face during the process and that she was one of them. She said 'Me and others, we have seen a tear on the Virgin's face'. In her account, Paqui got chill bumps, giggled, and her eyes welled up with tears.

According to the *camaristas*, the role the *Santero* plays in the changing of the statue is that he leaves buckets of soap and water, sponges and towels by the statue in the chamber for when they arrive. Another one of the *Santero*'s roles is to protect the statue's modesty from outsiders while

the *camaristas* do their work. In the beginning of my research, before I had fully grasped what was going on at the shrine, I asked the *Santero* why he could not be present during the washing and changing of the virgin. He exclaimed, ‘You’re a woman! Would you want some man looking at you while you got changed?’

### *The Virgin in Procession*

Every year on the Sunday that falls after the 12<sup>th</sup> of September (the day of the Virgin) the Virgin of Alcala is processed around her territory. At the processions that I attended in September of 2007 and 2008, there were just as many men as women in attendance. The ages of the people vary from the elderly to the very young. The procession appears to be a family affair. An enormous pot of stew is cooked to feed all of the procession goers. It is cooked on an open fire and stirred with what look like rowing paddles. Here, the food is ‘free’, as the cost is covered by the Virgin, so all that attend leave with a full belly.



4.28 The making of food at the procession



I have participated in two of the Virgin's *romerias*, one in September 2007 and another in September 2008. At each one, the crowds are stifling and large. People push and shove to get a better view of the Virgin, and they also push and shove to be able to touch the bier while in procession. Just before the Virgin was brought out and placed on her bier before one of her annual processions, I watched how the bier, already outside, was kissed and leaned upon by devotees. Some elderly women wrapped their arms around it and would not leave their spot for fear of someone else taking it.



4.29 Annual procession, or *romeria*, of the Virgin around her territory.

The weight of the processional bier is distributed among men and women alike. After a time in procession, the bier carriers stop and allow others to take their place. The *templete* that houses the Virgin is made of solid silver. According to Father Marco, the Virgin's mantles also weigh more than the statue itself, so supports must be placed under the mantle. All of these factors make the Virgin's processional bier a heavy load to carry.

At other processions of the Virgin I have attended in Andalusia (San Fernando's Virgin del Carmen and Cadiz' Nuestra Señora de la Alegria), the people in attendance appear to be more or less the same as those who attend processions of the Virgin of Alcala in terms of gender balance, age and economic social class. There are just as many men as women, and people of all ages can be found to participate. As these are 'city' processions, compared to the village countryside procession of Alcala, there is no food cooked for devotees. Further, the virgins of San Fernando and Cadiz are 'church' virgins. They do not have an *ermita*/sanctuary.

There is a large Spanish gypsy (*Gitano*) presence at the *romerias* of the Virgin of Alcala, and this also differs from the processions I have observed in San Fernando and Cadiz. My mother-in-law told me that there is also a large *Gitano* presence at the annual procession of the Virgin del Rocio in Huelva. The church that houses the Virgin del Rocio is located in the countryside as well. In September 2007, my husband and I camped on the grounds of the sanctuary the night before the procession. There were other people camping, too. Out of the darkness I could see the land dotted with fire light. I could hear also hear flamenco guitar, clapping (*las palmas*) and singing. People were also drinking and driving dirt bikes all over the terrain. Later on during the night, groups of adolescents turned up and played music loudly from their car boots. The atmosphere was one of tolerance, yet I found myself somewhat on edge and out of my depth. I have never experienced this kind of devotion at 'roots level' before.

### **Interpretations of Observations**

I have drawn interpretations from the data retrieved in the fieldwork. Pertaining to the role of Father Marco, it can be suggested that he typifies post Vatican Council II attitudes toward the Virgin Mary, and the theological role of the Virgin Mary in contrast to how the *Santero* and

other devotees engage her. He appeared to have no sense of taboo in telling me the details about how the Virgin is made. I took from this that Father Marco had, in fact, seen the virgin disrobed, but never found out if this was a permissible act because of his vow of celibacy. Father Marco appeared to see the Virgin as a statue, not as a living 'her'. This disclosure of what is regarded as deeply taboo to her devotees, i.e. the Virgin's physicality beneath her mantle, indicates a lack of attachment and/or objectification of the statue that I found most intriguing.

As mentioned before, the shrine of the Virgin is not a church. Father Marco's apparent detachment from the Virgin could potentially originate from two different sources. First, Father Marco is a young post Vatican II priest. Second, although he officiates at the rites that take place in the shrine, according to a conversation I had with the *Santero*, more people choose to have their weddings, baptisms and funerals at the shrine of the Virgin than they do the church. This could simply be because of the shrine's countryside location, i.e. practically, parking is ample at the shrine while it is a source of difficulties in the village (this speculative information is influenced from my own experience and difficulties with parking in the village of Alcala as well as my own preference for the open air, olive trees, and views of the Sierra mountain range that surround the shrine). These practical considerations do not, however, negate the assertion that Mary sometimes poses problems to priests and theologians due to her popularity among vernacular Catholics. Not only because of her gender, but because, as mentioned before, the popularity of the Virgin and the frequency with which the villagers visit the shrine outweighs that of liturgical services.

In terms of the procession, when the Virgin is carried around her territory on the bier there is a reversal of performance. From my observation, this is when she performs for her devotees. Her processional bier can be touched, kissed, and carried, and she not only accessible, but interactive.



During this event, the Virgin appears to be truly treated like a queen. She is dressed in her most expensive mantle (some of them have gold thread, some are more humble) and she is adored by her subjects as they throw bouquet after bouquet of flowers on the bier. Here, the Virgin displays her bountiful, motherly nature.

### *Similarities to the Hindu murti*

The ways in which the Virgin of Alcala are dressed and displayed are similar to those of the Hindu *murti*. Although Hindus and Catholics do not do religion in the same way, the seeing eyes of the Virgin reflect the eyes of found on the *murti*. *Murtis* are either directly on display in Hindu temples, or else they can be brought out on special occasions for the worshipper to receive *darshan* (sight) of the statue. The 'normal' *murtis* one sees in a Hindu temple, e.g. Vishnu, Krishna, Radha, Durga, Shiva, Ganesh, are treated as if they are alive. Following a visit to India and Sri Lanka, George Chryssides (University of Birmingham) told me that devotees change the clothes of the *murti* and offer food and drink to them. He said 'I have even seen miniature salt and pepper pots being placed alongside the offerings - real attention to detail here!' The ceremony for offering food is known as *bhog*, and the curtains around the *murtis* are drawn in order to ensure privacy. Like the Virgin having her clothes changed and being bathed, the *murtis* do not want all the public coming in and watching them at these intimate moments.

### *Note about Mary and the Goddess*

Before continuing into the ethnographic account of the Goddess, I should note here that I am aware of the common idea that the Virgin Mary is a continuation and superimposition of ancient local Goddesses such as Isis or Cybele (to name two of many). When Christianity was in its early stages of growth in the ancient world, goddesses were replaced by statues and images of Mary.

Indeed, Imna (the historian) made the observation that the statue and the style of the shrine share an uncanny likeness to those of some of the female deities celebrated throughout the ancient worlds of Greece and Egypt. Chidester (2000) tells us that Christian emperor Constantine selected the Greek city of Byzantium for his capital – a city that had he previously dedicated to Rhea ‘mother of the gods’ and that later became identified with Athena, Hecate, Cybele, and Isis. As Mary’s royal status grew, she slowly began to assume the roles previously held by the former pantheon. These roles included that of divine mother, urban protectress, agricultural and fertility insurer, and goddess of fortune. Mary, like her predecessors, was crowned, and called ‘virgin’, ‘bride’ and ‘queen’, and she offered nourishment and salvation (Chidester, 2000: 314). However interesting and poignant are these ideas, I suggest that those ideas be temporarily suspended both for the sake of this chapter and in respect of those devotees that might find that idea disagreeable. It is not the point of this work to say that Mary is really one form or another of the Goddess, or, as some Catholics might think, that the Goddess is really a popular seeking for Mary. It is, however, the point of this work to comparatively illustrate the conceptual and ontological uses of religious offerings that take place in relation to the Goddess, the Virgin and Mary. In any case, the point is to work out how materiality is used in relation to a new religious movement and to two continued traditions, one interrupted, the other not. Catholicism in both England and Spain has suffered the consequences of interrupted devotion through different reforms, cultural ideologies and political movements, and these deep changes are reflected in the modes of physical, active relating with statues of the Virgin.

## *Chapter 5*

### *The Goddess of Glastonbury*

This chapter provides an ethnographic account of the Glastonbury Goddess religion. I began investigating this religiosity in August 2007. Living six miles from the town of Glastonbury, transportation and accessibility were never a problem. This research is based on a series of 'day trips' where casual visits, participation in events and ceremonies, as well as processions took place. Fieldwork ended the following year in August, 2008, but, as with the shrine of the Virgin, I frequently return to both Glastonbury and the temple.

This chapter begins with a survey of Glastonbury, its many identities, and how those identities have helped to create the Glastonbury Goddess religiosity that currently exists there. Following this chapter surveys the religious objects found there, i.e. the material use, creation, expression and engagement that take place in accordance with Glastonbury Goddess devotion. Its ethnographic account reveals the materials used in the creation of Goddess 'devotionals', temple dressings, offerings and aesthetics. It also reveals the various ways in which statues of the Goddess and other images are created, treated and performed for. In essence, this ethnographic account attempts to 'take a snapshot of' and account for a form of religious materiality that is in a constant state of change, renovation and flux, and has provided the reader with an understanding of the myriad colorful forms of materiality in use within the Glastonbury Goddess religion. My interpretations of these observations are included in a final section of this chapter.

#### *Glastonbury*

Nestled in the rolling green hills of Somerset in the Southwest of England, Glastonbury is a small market town with a population of around 8,700 (Parish Population Statistics, 2001)

inhabitants. Having had lived in Glastonbury for two years, I have encountered Glastonbury's many names: the 'Isle of Apples', the 'Isle of Glass', the 'Isle of the Dead', and 'Avalon' (Glastonbury's mystical and other worldly counterpart). Contemporarily, many claim Glastonbury as home to ancient mystery schools, the resting place of King Arthur and his Lady Guinevere, the burial place of the Holy Grail, and home to the ancient and contemporary Goddess of Glastonbury (Bowman, 2005: 165).

Glastonbury's 'identity' is volatile. It is home to a patchwork of religions, beliefs, mythologies, spiritualities, and ideals. It is a place where many faiths such as Paganism, Christianity, New Age beliefs, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and other religiosities cross paths, run parallel, conflict and collide. Although Glastonbury's 'sacredness' has deep, historical Christian roots, Bowman tells us another story of Glastonbury's 'sacredness' as it is experienced contemporarily. She writes

From the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, influences from the Celtic revival, Theosophy and esotericism were felt in Glastonbury (Benham 1993), and from the 1970's it gained a media reputation as a centre for "hippies," "New Age travelers," and people seeking alternative lifestyles and spiritual experiences. Regarded as the epicenter of New Age in England, some see Glastonbury's significance in terms of leylines, as a node where leylines converge, a centre of earth energies. In global terms, Glastonbury is regarded as the "Heart Chakra" of planet earth (Bowman, 2003: 163).

Despite its current diversity of religiosities, two dominant historicities can be identified that run parallel to one another in Glastonbury, Pagan and Christian. I must add that both of these historical and mythological streams have several variations, but for the sake of clarity, I will call

them thus and will add that they both play vastly large roles in influencing Glastonbury's contemporary identities, especially Glastonbury's 'Celtic connection' (Bowman, 2007: 19).

### *Landscape*

Glastonbury is famous both locally and worldwide for many things, but most notably is Glastonbury's inspiring surrounding landscape and Glastonbury's most iconic feature, the Glastonbury Tor. The Tor dominates the Somerset landscape and can be seen from as far as South Wales on a clear day. The Glastonbury Tor has served as a visible land marker for those making religious pilgrimages to Glastonbury and forms a large part of the religious materiality that is interacted with, reproduced through various art mediums, and circulated in Glastonbury.

Historically and contemporarily, Glastonbury's unique landscape plays a major role in Glastonbury's status as an axis point for Pagans and Christians alike (amongst the other religiosities encountered there). Bowman says

Some regard it [Glastonbury] as a significant prehistoric centre of Goddess worship, confirmed for present day devotees by figures of the Goddess they discern in the landscape and by the existence in the Christian era of strong devotion to Our Lady St Mary of Glastonbury and to St Bridget, both widely regarded as Christianized forms of the Goddess (Bowman, 2004: 273).

These myths surrounding Glastonbury's landscape are particularly responsible for inspiring the visions that have helped create the Glastonbury Goddess religion. Glastonbury's Christian mystical traditions and Anglican and Catholic Christians also have strong connections to Glastonbury. The story of the Holy Thorn that exists on Wearyall Hill supposedly placed there by Joseph of Arimathea when he brought Jesus as a child to Glastonbury has given Christians a

strong hold on Glastonbury's surrounding myths and landscape. According to Bowman's research, links with 'Celtic Christianity' and stories connected with St Bride play large roles in Glastonbury's diverse past and present (Bowman, 2007).

### *The Glastonbury Goddess Religion*

The story of Bridget is foundational to the Glastonbury Goddess religiosity. The Christian version of St Bridget's story is as follows:

It is said that St Bridget visited Glastonbury 488 and spent time at Beckery or Bride's Mound, an area on the edge of Glastonbury where there seems to have been a chapel dedicated to St Mary Magdalene (Bowman, 2007: 24)

And,

In the late nineteenth century John Arthur Goodchild claimed that there had been in Glastonbury the survival of an ancient Irish cult venerating the female aspect of the deity which became attached to the figure of St Bride (Benham 1993) (Bowman, 2007: 25).

Kathy Jones (author, writer and resident of Glastonbury) along with a core group of other devotees adopted this idea of a surviving 'cult' dedicated to the feminine divine as the foundation upon which the contemporary Goddess movement in Glastonbury was created. According to Bowman, Jones claims, for example, 'Where we find St Bridget we know that the goddess Bridie was once honoured' (Bowman, 2004: 281, citing Jones 2000: 16). This forms a kind of Glastonbury Goddess religion mission statement which points toward the reclamation, restoration, and transformation of Glastonbury's history, legends and mythologies. The restoration of the Goddess to Glastonbury by Jones and a woman called Tyna Redpath has its

'official' roots, according to Bowman (2007: 26), in the first Goddess conference held in 1996, and further, with the Goddess procession that took place accordingly. The ideas of both restoration and reclamation of the Goddess from an imposed Christianity forms major parts of both this religiosity and this chapter at relevant points. The 'restoration' and 'reterritorialisation' of the Goddess is done partly through the re-interpretation of history and myth, partly through their re-invention, and partly through material presence. That is the more materiality is created in relation to the Goddess and her temple, the more visible the Goddess religiosity becomes in Glastonbury. Jones says,

Together we are bringing the Goddess alive once again through our worship of Her, through spiritual practice, ceremonies, actions, creative expression, study, writing, artwork, music, dance and in our daily lives (2001: i).

In this way the presence of the Glastonbury Goddess religion is in no doubt in spite of what are understood to be past Christian attempts at suppression. Arguably, Goddess materiality is plentiful as well as bright, colorful, and attention catching for this very reason. The preference for the use of indigenous materials along with the claim to be the first indigenous temple dedicated to the Goddess in over 1,500 years adds to this religiosity's aim of what can be called 'reterritorialisation'. According to Kellie Jones,

Reterritorialisation includes recapturing one's (combined and various) history, much of which has been dismissed as an insignificant footnote to the dominant culture (Jones, 2007).

An important part of the Goddess religion in Glastonbury is based on 'reterritorialising' or 'reclaiming' the land from male dominant, Christian, oppression where the Goddess was pushed aside and nearly forgotten. Kathy Jones writes,

The Lady of these islands who was lost in the mists of history is being rediscovered and brought back into the light of day, wearing new clothes, shining with renewed radiance. She is whispering in our ears, appearing in our visions, calling to us across time to remember Her and we are responding. All over Britain thousands of women and men now celebrate the Goddesses of this land in ways which probably haven't happened for a thousand years or more (2001: i).

For the Goddess religion, a link to the past has been created that establishes a valid, authentic claim to Glastonbury where the Lady of Avalon can be championed and restored to her rightful place. This reclamation of the feminine satisfies the need to celebrate that which had been previously overlooked, forgotten and/or oppressed.

### *The Account*

My research was mainly conducted in a series of one-day visits to Glastonbury that took place over four seasons. This is significant to the research because the Glastonbury Goddess religiosity works 'cyclically' within the cycles of nature, the materiality created and engaged being influenced thus. I made around 20 visits to the temple in the course of that year, including ceremonies and events, with additional visits to conduct interviews. The Glastonbury Goddess religion is a vernacular, local occurrence specific to the location, landscape and place that is Glastonbury. It shares common features with other contemporary forms of Goddess worship, and is 'indigenous to the British isles' (Jones, 2001: i). My main informant, Georgina Sirett-Hardie (a



Priestess of Avalon) served as my source and often as a contact point with other members of the religion. Apart from time spent visiting her in the temple I conducted four interviews with Georgina, one formal, two semi-formal, and one informal. Georgina's role within the Glastonbury Goddess religion is a significant one. She is heavily involved in the temple, its 'daily life' and major events. Other informants were the temple caretakers and others who I met at events and decorating during my 'work experience' in helping to paint and decorate the Goddess Hall.

From my experience, devotees are mostly female, range from between 18 to 80 years of age, and come from all social classes. There is a male presence in this religiosity, but it is eclipsed by the female one. During my research I did not visit other Goddess Temples, apart from the one that is also set up in Glastonbury, but as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, others do exist. The Glastonbury Goddess Temple can be considered the 'parent temple' to the ones affiliated in Holland, Belgium, Argentina, the United States and Australia as it has 'trained' many of the founding members of these temples, which might indicate similarities in terms of materiality, terminology, ethos, and social class among its members.

Time spent participating and observing in the daily life of the temple on my field visits and at events such as the temple dressings, oracular evenings, and processions, has shown that in the Glastonbury Goddess religion, there are several female deities understood to be connected both with different parts of Glastonbury's landscape and to other places in the British Isles. However, I was told that there is one Goddess that presides over the whole of Glastonbury (and Avalon). The Glastonbury Goddess 'herself' is elusive and not easy to pin down either in terms of her mystical and/or embodied self, or of the language and grammatical forms used in reference to her. Cynthia Eller writes,

One very real difficulty in writing about feminist spirituality is deciding whether to use the singular or the plural in referring to the divine (1995:133).

For the sake of simplicity, I refer to the Goddess as singular. This does not, however, exclude her other 'selves'. Further, the Goddess Temple is a source of continual change, renovation, innovation and devotion, whereby countless forms of volatile, votive expression can be found. The material practices of the temple are vibrantly centered around the altar, the painting of the Goddess and the willow wickerwork goddess statues that reside there. This is not, however, where Goddess centered materiality begins and ends. It is found, created, interacted with and used in the daily life of the temple, in offerings, ceremonies, processions, priestess training, healing events, and more. Indigeneity plays an important role in how materiality is created and engaged. (Indigeneity is used here to describe that which is indigenous to the land surrounding Glastonbury, or that which is honored as being from the body of the Goddess).

### *The Temple*

The Glastonbury Goddess Temple is situated just off the Glastonbury High Street and is both an active point in the community as well as a point of Pagan pilgrimage for Goddess worshippers. First opened in 2002, the Glastonbury Goddess Temple is said to be the first indigenous temple dedicated to the Goddess in 1,500 years and it is the first of a network of temples that have been founded in different parts of Europe, the USA, Argentina, Maui and Australia

([www.goddess temple.co.uk](http://www.goddess temple.co.uk) [Accessed 21/08/2011]).



5.1 The Glastonbury Goddess Temple. Outside view

The temple occupies the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of a courtyard building and is a large open space with lilac carpet and A-framed high ceilings. The temple is open six days a week and provides a place where people can meditate, enter into personal prayer, read, make offerings, stop and rest, and/or seek healing and/or oracular advice. In the January interview, Georgina said ‘When the temple was being painted and decorated before first opening, the Goddess was invoked and painted on the walls to create a space’ that would be ‘energetically protected’. After the Goddess’s many forms were painted onto the walls, all of the walls were then washed over with lilac paint, which is, according to Georgina, ‘the color of the Goddess’. Georgina told me that the Goddess, ‘Novala, Our Lady of Avalon, keeper of the mysteries; and Lady of the Mists of Avalon presides over the lands from which the Tor is visible to the naked eye’.



Inside the Goddess Temple the Goddess is worshipped in the forms of willow, wickerwork figures who sometimes occupy the main altar of the temple alongside a painting of the Lady of Avalon. The painting below illustrates the Goddess in her 'dark aspect'.



5.2 Wickerwork figure of the Goddess to the right

Present in the temple are also statue forms of the Nine Morgens (illustrated further on), important figures to the mythology and understanding of this religious complex.

On my visits to the temple, I have found that it is usually dimly lit and candles and incense create a mood of tranquility and calm. Devotional music dedicated to the Goddess is usually playing softly in the background. The website of Jones (different from the Goddess Temple website) describes the Goddess Temple as,

A place set aside for the Lady of Avalon. A place of beauty, love and welcoming joy. A place for those who love Her to meet each other. A place for celebrations, rituals, rites of

passage, for all seasons of the year and for all aspects of Goddess. Where we may laugh and cry, sing and weep in her loving embrace (2008).

Although I am not a Goddess devotee, I often visit the temple when I am in Glastonbury because of its calming, relaxing ambience.

I documented in my field notes that the materials used to decorate and facilitate the temple aesthetic often come from the land. The other objects present in the temple often come, according to Georgina, from the homes of devotees. Here one can see bones, feathers, stones, small clay and bronze goddess figures, such as the Venus of Willendorf. There are also plastics and artificial materials within the temple, despite the overall idea of that which resides within the temple must be indigenous to the land around Glastonbury. For example, according to Georgina in a formal interview that took place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January, 2008, 'The willow used to make the goddess figures is indigenous to the Somerset levels'. She said that 'indigenous materials' are 'preferred'. Offerings are also often made from local materials found there, i.e. in and around Glastonbury's landscape. However, as will be discussed in detail in this chapter, the process of dressing the temple is where one can identify how materials are used and engaged by devotees.

### *The Temple Complex – how it works*

From information gathered, I have found that there are distinctions between those who care for the temple on a daily basis, the organizing Trust that looks after both the aesthetic and monetary affairs of the Goddess and her Temple, and those who 'set the stage for devotion'. These roles often overlap and intermingle. To begin with, within the Goddess religion in Glastonbury there are people called 'temple Melissas'. I am told by an informant that the word Melissa is Greek, meaning worker bee, and in this case refers to one who works for a queen bee, or the Goddess.

Melissas are volunteer Goddess devotees in charge of daily 'stewarding' at the Goddess Temple. Melissas are both male and female, but generally tend to be female. Some Melissas are both priestess and priests while being Melissas, while others are only Melissas and not specifically trained Goddess clergy. They are responsible for ritually calling the Goddess into the Temple on a daily basis when opening the Temple, and 'letting her go' of the evening when the temple is closed down, again through the use of ritual. Melissas are also responsible for informing temple visitors, for collecting money for sales of books and other temple/Goddess literature and cards, and for making sure that the temple and its daily affairs run smoothly. People also often come into the temple to get smudged: cleansed with sage and/or sweet grass. The Melissas are trained by the temple priestesses to do this work.

An informant told me that all are equal in the Glastonbury Goddess religion and that there is no high priestess or priest at the Goddess Temple. However, the founders of the Goddess Temple are the people who generally have the last word in terms of aesthetic, events, and organization. Although active Temple devotees are encouraged to express their devotion through the creation of Goddess centered materiality, if certain objects are not 'agreeable' to the founding members, then they will be removed from the temple and/or changed. The founding members also look after and control the Goddess Trust. This includes ensuring that associated charities are given their funds, that the annual 'Goddess conference' (a weeklong event filled with workshops and celebrations that ends with a statue of the Goddess being processed around Glastonbury) and other events are organized, and that donations find their way to the Trust: The Glastonbury Goddess Temple, Company Limited by guarantee is a non-profit organization.

*Who is the Glastonbury Goddess? Who are the Nine Morgens?*

The Goddess Temple is a place where the Goddess and goddesses who are indigenous to the British Isles and local to Glastonbury and the Isle of Avalon (Glastonbury's mystical counterpart) are celebrated. In the temple, the deities take the forms of willow wickerwork statues who are venerated, spoken with, petitioned, and said by Georgina (when I asked her about the 'presence' of the Goddess) to 'embody' the Goddess. However, in common with new, non-doctrinal religious movements that emphasize individuality, this is not widely agreed upon. While painting and decorating the Goddess Hall, I was working alongside two female devotees. I asked them how they 'see' the Goddess statues. They both said that the willow figures in the temple are *representations* of the Goddess. However, Georgina and the two mentioned above agreed that the Goddess transcendently presides *over* and hovers *above* Glastonbury and its landscape while simultaneously being evidently present *in* the landscape.

The individual 'aspects' of the Goddess who are worshipped at Glastonbury, along with the Nine Morgens, are sourced from contemporary fiction, writings on myths and legends, and historical accounts. However, the main sources for 'who the Goddess is' within the Goddess religion at Glastonbury come from the key founding member, Kathy Jones. According to an online article from the BBC called 'Goddess Spirituality in Glastonbury' (BBC 2008), Jones says the main Goddesses worshipped are the Lady of Avalon (who is Morgen la Fey), the Nine Morgens, Brigit or Bridie of the Sacred Flame, Modron who is Great Mother of the lineage of Avallach, Our Lady Mary of Glastonbury, the Crone of Avalon, the Tor Goddess, Lady of the Hollow Hills, Lady of the Lake and the Lady of the Holy Springs and Wells. Here, the Nine Morgens are referred to goddesses yet in an interview with an informant they were referred to as not goddesses but as 'healers'. Jones has written several works based on the Glastonbury

Goddess, such as *The Ancient British Goddess* (2001). She acknowledges a few of her sources of inspiration such as Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*, Marija Gimbutas' *Language of the Goddess* and *Civilisation of the Goddess*, Caitlin and John Matthews' *Ladies of the Lake*, and 'Michael Dames for his Goddess inspired views of landscape in *The Avebury Cycle* and *Silbury Treasure*' (2001:ii).

The figures of the Nine Morgens are permanent residents in the Goddess Temple. They are also willow wickerwork statues. The Nine Morgens form a protective circle around a small space in the temple that is, according to a conversation with one of the temple Melissas, dedicated to those who want or need healing. The roles of the Nine Morgens can be best described as healing Goddesses who are connected to different parts of the landscape around the town such as springs, mounds, and groves. Kathy Jones says that the Nine Morgens are a ninefold Sisterhood who 'rule over the Isle of Avalon surrounded by the Lake of Mysts' (2001: 213). Their names were recorded by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the *Vita Merlini* in the twelfth century as Moronoe, Mazoe, Gliton ea, Gliten, Cliton, Tyrone, Thitis, Thetis and Morgen La Fey'. There were also nine legendary ladies of the lake named by John and Caitlin Matthews as 'Igraine, Guinevere, Morgan, Argant, Nimue or Vivienne, Enit, Kundry, Dindraine and Ragness, who derive their powers from the Otherworld (Jones, 2001: 213).





5.3 The Nine Morgens in the Goddess Temple

Georgina told me in an informal conversation that took place in the temple that sometimes one of the statues of the Nine Morgens takes a place on the main altar in the temple, and she is dressed to be the Goddess of that point in the ritual year. On a visit to the temple one afternoon, a male Melissa who appeared to be in his 50s told me that some of the people who look after the daily life of the temple have intimate relationships with the statues of the Morgens. Both Georgina and the Melissa said that the Morgens sometimes move, that their facial expressions change, and that ‘things’ occur around them. They also said that many people have also experienced ‘strange things’ in the presence of the Morgens.

#### *The Glastonbury Goddess Wheel, Goddesses and Corresponding Materiality*

The Glastonbury Goddess religion is based on cyclical renewals and transformations. At each of the eight points in the ritual year different aspects of the Goddess are worshipped on the Goddess Wheel of the year (based on the Wiccan Wheel), also known as the Medicine Wheel, or the

sacred Wheel of Britannia, or Ana, and the temple is dressed accordingly (Jones, 2001: 30).

These 'points' are the eight compass directions and are associated with the seasons of the calendar year. They are North, North-East, East, South-East, South, South-West, West, and North-West, and they are 'represented' through corresponding altars (in corresponding colors) within the temple. Further, a wicker Goddess that corresponds with each point in the year is displayed. I have attempted to simplify information about the goddesses worshipped at the eight points of the Goddess wheel of the year. The Goddess Temple website provides an overview of the 'Medicine Wheel' and the particular deities and correspondences. Here they are in table form:

Goddesses	Element	Sabbat	Color	Animal	Objects	Direction
<b>Mother of Air:</b> <b>Danu, Anu,</b> <b>Arianrhod, Bone</b> <b>Woman, Stone</b> <b>Woman, Cailleach,</b> <b>Tyrone</b>	Air	<i>Winter Solstice</i>	Violet, Silver	Wren, Eagle, Owl, Buzzard	Scepter, Sword, Feather, Fan	North
<b>Maiden Goddess:</b> <b>Bright, Bridle,</b> <b>Kernababy, Thitis</b>		<i>Imbolc</i>	White	Swan, Snake, Wolf, Cow	Grael, Spindle, Wheel	North-East
<b>Mother of Fire:</b> <b>Artha, Grainne,</b> <b>Sulis, Eostra, Cliton</b>	Fire	<i>Spring Equinox</i>	Green, Gold	Bear, Hare, Hen, Cat	Wand/Rod	East

<b>Lover/Virgin</b> <b>Goddess: (Ker)</b> <b>Rhiannon, Olwen,</b> <b>Elen, Blodeuwedd,</b> <b>Thetis</b>		<i>Beltane</i>	Red	Mare, Horse, Dove, Swan	Comb, Mirror, Shell	South-East
<b>Mother of Water:</b> <b>Domnu, Queen of</b> <b>the Deep, Lady of</b> <b>the Springs and</b> <b>Wells, Lady of the</b> <b>Lake, Gliten</b>	Water	<i>Summer</i> <i>Solstice</i>	Blue, Turquoise	Dolphin, Whale, Salmon, Seal	Chalice, Shell	South
<b>Mother Goddess:</b> <b>Ker, Grain Goddess,</b> <b>Madron, Glitonea</b>		<i>Lammas</i>	Yellow	Horned Deer, Cattle, Sheep, Goats	Loom, Shuttle	South-West
<b>Mother of Earth:</b> <b>Banbha, Brigantia,</b> <b>Gaia, Moronoe</b>	Earth	<i>Autumn</i> <i>Equinox</i>	Brown, Orange	Boar, Badger, Fox;	Stone, Orb, Crystal	West
<b>Crone Goddess:</b> <b>Dark Mother,</b> <b>Keridwen, Sheela na</b> <b>Gig; Mazoe</b>		<i>Samhain</i>	Black	Sow, Toad,	Cauldron, Sickle,	North-West

5.4 Table of Goddess and materiality correspondences

Further, as will be demonstrated in the section titled 'Offerings', I have observed that materiality associated with that particular Goddess/season are brought to the temple and left in acts of veneration and devotion.

### *Dressing the Temple*

Temple dressings are where devotees come together and a flurry of creative, collective and votive religious expression take place. This is where the decorations of the temple are taken down, and either boxed and put away, or reused in a new, creative way. The wicker Goddess figure at the altar is either, moved and replaced with another wicker figure, or re dressed to display colors corresponding with one of the eight points in the ritual year. The different altars throughout the temple (one at each of the eight compass directions) are also dismantled and rearranged and re-dressed. Goddess Temple dressing shares similarities to other vernacular practices such as arranging seasonal flowers in churches or preparing for Christmas by putting up decorations. It is, however, unique in that it is inspired by a particular form of relational aesthetic which inspires devotion to a Goddess who is particular to a specific point in the ritual year. Unlike Christmas decorations or church flower arranging, the temple dressing is not only about decorating in traditional ways, it is about inspiring and maintaining devotion to the Goddess.

From what Georgina told me and from I have witnessed, Temple dressings involve drawing on a collective pool of creative ideas and energies that comes from various devotees (but as mentioned before, a handful of them have the final say). No two temple dressings are the same. Although many of the same materials will be used in different cycles and different years, they are never used in exactly the same way. I was present during one of the temple dressings that took place in preparation for Imbolc (1<sup>st</sup> of February) in the middle of January, 2008 (just before

the fieldwork trip to Spain). In all, 26 people turned out to help dress the temple. There were two women directing the creativity, but within their directions there was space to move around and play with ideas and materials. Music dedicated to Goddess devotion was playing on a CD player and the mood was light and fun. The women and men split off into several groups at different points in the temple. Men were generally doing work such as climbing ladders, moving heavy pieces, and scraping old candle wax out of candle holders in preparation for new candles.

Women were more involved with the actual creativity and the aesthetic of the temple. One group was dedicated to dressing branches that hung from the ceiling beams with long green ribbons. These ribbons had bells and white feathers tied to the ends of them. I found that this is because green and white are the colors of Brigit, or Bridie, because Bridie is the youngest goddess who begins the quickening that brings spring in from winter. Bridie is also the swan, hence the feathers. Other groups were put onto the tasks of dressing the eight corners of the room using the colors that represent those directions and those deities. Another group was dedicated to dressing the actual wicker statue and the main altar dedicated to Bridie. One of the Nine Morgens was brought and placed to the right of the newly placed painting of the Lady of Avalon and became Bridie/Brigit. A veil was placed over her face and the body of the figure was draped and robed in white materials of different textures. The Goddess that had been there before was placed back in the ring of healing and resumed her status as one of the Nine Morgens. While I was there, the new painting of the Lady of Avalon was unveiled to sound of cheers, delight and adoration. I heard one devotee say 'Isn't she beautiful...oh, she's just perfect'.

It was during the temple dressing that I realized how loose and spontaneous is the materiality used in the temple and by the Glastonbury Goddess religion. I found from climbing into the attic to retrieve the materials (as I was asked/sent to do) that the materials used to dress the temple are

stored mainly in lilac bags and small boxes. A priestess of Avalon said that this color has been chosen intentionally because it is the color of the Glastonbury Goddess, or the Lady of Avalon. Each bag is labeled in permanent black marker by the season for which it is used, for example, the bags say 'Winter Solstice', 'Imbolc', 'Samhain', 'Beltane', 'Summer Solstice', 'Spring Equinox', 'Autumn Equinox', 'Yule' and 'Lammas'. Then, once down from the attic, all the materials are taken from the bags and strewn across the floor. From here, people come and take pieces of material, mixing and matching and throwing back that which is not useful in that moment. The contents from the bags come from donations of devotees. They are colorful pieces of material, and different colored curtains. The lilac bags mainly contain materials of all corresponding goddess related and seasonal colors. Both in boxes that are stored and in newly brought in bags are feathers, bells, tinsel, beads and more. Caroline, who I had not formally met at this point, is responsible for the main altar dressing. At one stage I was helping her and she sent me on a mission for white material to be placed under one of the smaller goddess statues. When I returned with a netted fabric, she sharply said 'We don't want the kitchen curtain look for Bridie'. Instead, I was sent to find smooth, flowing material that better complimented the altar arrangement. During one of the dressings for the four corners, one woman was using black and white to represent the going from autumn into winter. Kathy Jones questioned her about this in a jovial way, and the woman replied that that is what she wants to do because that is how she sees it. After a moment's pause for consideration, Jones simply said 'okay' and moved on.

During the temple dressing I was both participating and observing. As I was hanging ribbons from the rafters (after I had put small bells and feathers on their tips), I noticed a woman crying and others gathered around her to hug her and give her support. At another point one of the devotees sprang some good news on everyone of something that was happening in her life at the

moment. Here support in the form of cheers and 'well done!' were given. Toward the end of the dressing all the volunteers began to clean up and the temple was put back into order. At one point they were rounded up and asked who would be kind enough to wash, dry and iron the materials that had just been taken down. One woman reluctantly volunteered. The others laughed. All in all, I found the temple dressing to be a joyous event of devotion, creativity and love and support for each other.

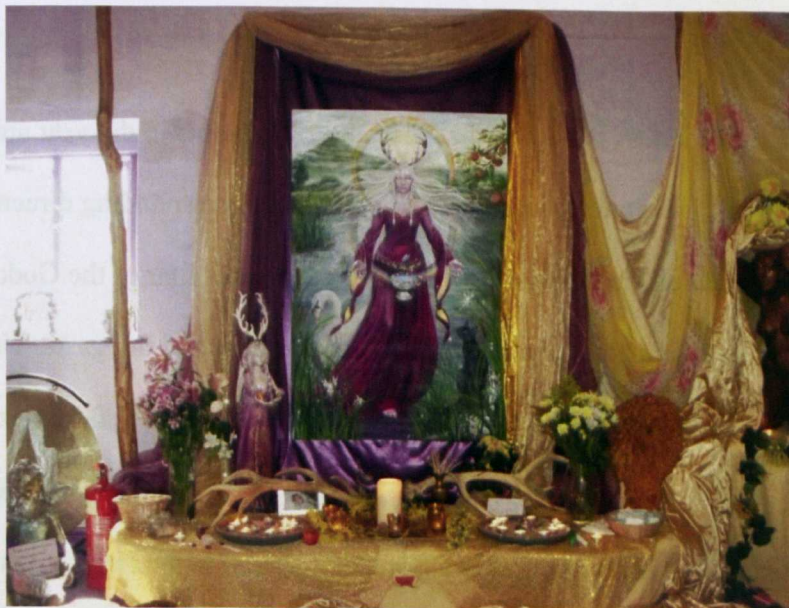
During an interview with Georgina that took place before I attended the temple dressing, she told me that 'the altar is decorated with prayer and ritual. We have a private ceremony that activates the goddess'. In my experience of being present at a temple dressing I did not see either of those things take place. What I observed during the altar dressing can be best described as working, creative aestheticism, i.e. people work together to create a devotional Goddess aesthetic. As for 'activating' the newly placed Goddess of that season, although I did not see this happen, it could have easily happened either later that evening, another day, or not at all. The other temple dressings that take place throughout the year follow similar lines of material engagement, but, as mentioned before, no two dressings will be the same in terms of creativity.

#### *Creation of Goddess centered objects/materiality*

Failing to contact the woman who creates the willow wicker figures of the Goddess, as mentioned before, on a visit to the Temple in June, 2010 I encountered the artist, called Caroline, who created the central altar painting in the temple. This encounter took place during a casual shopping visit to Glastonbury. As is sometimes my custom, I stop into the Goddess Temple to rest. Because I was not expecting to meet a potential informant (this was clumsy on my part), I did not have paper, pen, or other recording equipment with me. I did, however, rush from the encounter to a shop where I bought a notepad and pen. I quickly wrote down what I discovered



from the conversation. When Caroline begins a painting of the Goddess (in whichever of her aspects), she first starts consciously drawing then goes into a trance-like state where she channels the Goddess to come through in whatever way she [the Goddess] wishes. Commenting on the exhaustion this process brings, she said it is an incredible process carried out in love and devotion. Caroline said it was a 'space' from which she did not want to leave as it was far more appealing living in the world and landscape of the Goddess than in reality. On a second encounter with Caroline, she went into further detail about her processes. The year leading up to doing the painting was spent doing the priestess training in Glastonbury run by Kathy Jones. All of that year, according to Caroline, the priestesses in the training were told to focus on the Goddess. They had to spend hours focusing on and conjuring images of the Goddess, which was led by Jones's interpretation of what the Goddess should look like or what she should present 'energetically'. Caroline said that during that time, there was a black cat around; hence she painted a black cat into the painting of the Lady of Avalon.



5.5 Lady of Avalon and black cat in right hand corner



Interestingly, Caroline told me that it took roughly three days after the painting was finished for the Goddess to 'settle in' (her words) to the image. She said that during this time, 'a relationship between us [her and the Goddess] grows'. The day that I saw her in the temple, we both stood in front of the painting, and she told me how when she looks up and into the eyes of the painting, she sees the Goddess's eyes well up with tears of empathy for whatever it is that she is feeling or going through. Here we have a creator of a divine image who sees that image as containing and embodying the Goddess. She then began to muse over whether or not the image would gain memory of all of the people, love and devotion that have stood before her, and that would make the painting of the Goddess more powerful with years to come. Caroline then mused over her own death and said that this thing she created, which really wasn't from her, but through her, would be there long after she is dead. Then she said that she is amazed that people instantly relate and have relationship with the painting; that's it is amazing to see people fall down in tears before the altar and venerate and/or pray to the Goddess.

### *Offerings*

As indicated from the Goddess Wheel of the Year, the eight points in the year are 'represented through eight altars in the temple. These altars occupy their corresponding directions, and the materiality found at each one is also correspondent. At the main altar of the Goddess Temple (that occupies the largest and most central space), many objects and things are visible. Candles are there to be lit, and pieces of paper with pencils are in a basket in the floor next to the altar. There is another basket where notes are left, and there is a little donation plate where devotees leave money. Objects of natural materials are generally offered at the temple. On the altar, stones, feathers, acorns, hazelnuts, shells, plants, and flowers are quite commonly seen. Sometimes they are arranged in patterns, sometimes not. Stones such as crystals and rose quartz

are often seen, as well as pieces of bone, antler, wooden statues of goddesses, and sea shells can be seen in arrangements on the different altars around the temple. These natural objects are often, but not limited to being, indigenous to the Somerset levels. Ribbons, clouts, candles, hand-made ornaments, and/or jewelry (earrings, necklaces) are sometimes tied to or hung on the wicker goddess on display at that time.



5.6 Woman pinning a ribbon onto the Goddess figure after procession, 2008

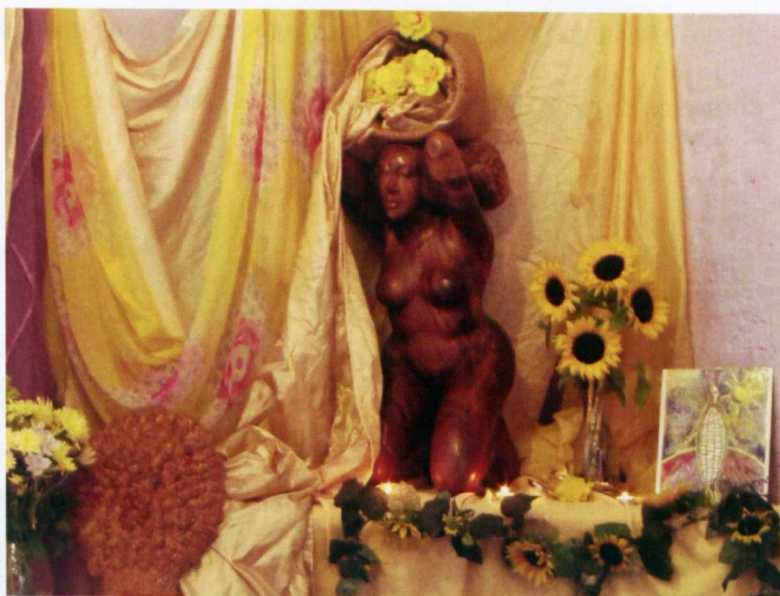
Offerings also consist of items such as money, paintings, drawings, jewelry of sentimental or other value, or photographs of loved ones who are either ill or passed away. However, the point of time on the wheel of the year dictates the types of offerings made to the Goddess on display in the temple and the materials of which those offerings consist. For example, snowdrops will be offered to Bridie, or Brigit, during and around the time of Imbolc (1 February).



#### 5.7 Yule offerings

Around the spring equinox, blown eggs and pink quartz are often left in honor of the Goddess Eostra or Cliton. At Lammas (around the first of August), bread is left as an offering on the altar in the temple, as are Bridie, or corn dollies.





5.8 Temple at Lammas and offerings

Ivy will be offered to Keridwen during Her time in the temple around Samhain (31<sup>st</sup> of October/ 1<sup>st</sup> of November).

In the autumn months, apples, fruits and nuts are left along with photographs of the deceased as memorials where they are either left on the altar or pinned/tied to the wicker statue during the time when ancestors are remembered. These photos often accompany a message such as, for example, 'you are loved and missed'. I did not feel it was appropriate or respectful to photograph the images of the dead that hung on the Goddess figures or sat on the altar at this time of year. I did, however, document them. One was a photograph of a baby wrapped in a white blanket with tubes attached to its nose, and the other was a photograph of a young man who appeared to be in his early 20s. Georgina told me that during the time of Keridwen, a cow skull was offered to the Temple from a female devotee's herd. The cow died naturally, so the skull was intact. The

devotee brought it to the temple to be adorned and dedicated to the bone goddess Danu, the goddess of death, during her time in the temple around the winter solstice.



5.9 Cow skull offering, Winter Solstice

I have observed how the skull is used and re used often in temple dressings. According to Georgina, other forms of offerings are also made to the Goddess Temple, such as the volunteered time of devotees in service to the temple and monetary donations.

### *Healing and the Goddess*

On a visit to the temple one day in the spring of 2008, Georgina told me that the Goddess is petitioned for many reasons. This often happens in times of hardship and need, in thanks, or in simple celebration of her. As in the case of the Virgin of Alcala, pledges and promises are sometimes made using the exemplifying phrase 'If you do this for me, I will buy you the grounds



on which to build a new temple'. She also said in the same conversation 'Bartering with the Goddess is tricky business'.

From informal interviews with two temple Melissas I also found that the Goddess is often petitioned for help with problems such as economic hardship, infertility, or asked to aid in healing spiritual, physical or psychological damage or difficulties encountered by either devotee or a loved one. The Glastonbury Goddess, for example, is said to perform 'miracles'. In an interview with Georgina, an account was given to me about a woman visiting Glastonbury who had a mild heart attack while she was in town. She was taken by her friends to the Goddess Temple where she said she was made better by the Goddess, and now the woman does anything she can to be of service to the Temple. Georgina said that she is known as 'Stitchwitch' and that she makes many of the banners and flags used in the yearly Goddess processions.



5.10 Examples of banners and flags made by 'Stitchwitch' devotee

As I sat in the temple and observed one day, those who appear to be familiar with the temple go directly and sit in the circle of the Nine Morgens. Those who have not visited the temple before are shown what to do by the temple Melissas. On two occasions I have been sitting in the temple and I have watched people create a queue outside the circle of the Morgens.



5.11 Woman lying in the center of the Morgens in the temple

After suffering a knee injury, I was conducting a fieldwork visit to the temple. The ‘Melissa’ on duty that day, after watching me limp up the steps to the temple from the window, insisted that I sit inside the Morgens circle for about half an hour, that doing so should make me feel better. I can report that I did not heal particularly quickly. In any case, as stated above, the mode with which pledges and promises are made share characteristics with those found both in Catholic devotion, particularly with devotion to the Virgin of Alcala.

### *Daily life of the temple*

One day I participated in the opening and closing of the Temple. Each day the temple is opened by the Melissas. First, the lights come on, then candles and incense are lit, and music begins to play. Then the lights go off and the mood is set. Depending on the ritual skill and experience of who is on 'Melissa joy', the temple is opened through a ceremony of invocation where the Goddess is invited into her temple. If the Melissa is not very experienced in his or her ceremonial skills of 'calling in the Goddess', then a more experienced priestess or Melissa will come and help aid in the ceremony. The day of my attendance, the Melissa in charge was not skilled enough to ritually invoke the Goddess and we had to wait for a trained Priestess to come and help.

The Goddess is called into the temple at the beginning of temple opening hours through a ceremony that calls each and every name of the Goddess (see table of correspondences). The temple is closed in the same way, but using the words, 'Good night [whoever the goddess of that time is] and bide well in your temple'. When I asked the Melissa on duty why they say this, she said that it 'closes down the energy' allowing the Goddess(s) 'to take a rest from people's needs'. When I later asked Georgina about this, she looked slightly confused. She then confirmed that the Goddess and the Nine Morgens rest in the evening when the temple is closed. As mentioned in the final part of Chapter 4, this is similar to that which takes place surrounding the Hindu *murti*: the curtains remain closed after their private meal and the gods have a period of rest. I then asked how that is possible, especially if people continued to make prayers to her outside the temple and beyond (many of the Glastonbury Goddess devotees are not local residents), thinking (not saying) that prayers might 'technically activate' the Goddess in the temple. She then said 'The Goddess is everywhere, all the time'.



In examining the daily life of the temple, I found that intimate, day to day, relationships with the Goddess figures and the Nine Morgens can take on 'real' interactions. During one of my visits to the temple Georgina told me that the faces of the Nine Morgens sometimes change. Georgina literally 'introduced' me to the statue figures of the 'Morgens of Avalon'. Here, she told me each of their names and then told them my name. She said that they have distinct personalities and the ability to heal. I took note that their faces are made from a type of cast alabaster plaster that has been placed on wicker/willow femininely shaped figures. She then proceeded to tell me that 'sometimes they look pissy or serious, and sometimes they look happy and pleased'. Georgina told me that when the Melissas are smudging the temple as part of their daily routine, they 'must smudge inside the Nine Morgens circle or else they'll [the Morgens] get pissy'. I assume from this last the Morgens enjoy being smudged. As mentioned before, interviews with the male Melissa and Georgina found that the Morgens have also been known to make things move and to make sounds in the Temple. Georgina told me the story of how she was in the temple alone one evening, and 'when I was closing the door to leave for the night, the gong in temple sounded on its own and it gave me a right fright'. Upon being asked if the statues were 'representations' of the Morgens or 'embodied' (I used the exact words 'representations' and 'embodied'), after a moment's pause for consideration, Georgina responded with one word: 'embodied'. Then she said: 'the statues *are* the Morgens'.

On a daily basis, people come from long and short distances to see the temple, to venerate the Goddess and to pray there. One day while visiting the temple, a woman came in, took her shoes off (which is required of all comers), went straight to the altar, placed some money on the altar, put a crystal on top of it, stood in front of the image of the Goddess, and put her hands together in prayer position at her lips. Then she got down on her knees and did the same, where she sat

kneeling in front of the altar, eyes closed, for quite some time. Then she got up, put her hands in prayer position in front of lips again before turning around, put her shoes back on and went out the door. She was probably there for an estimated 8 minutes. One of the priestesses was on Melissa duty ('Melissa joy' they correct me) and she told me that that woman comes once a month from far up north, puts money on the altar and leaves again.

While the daily opening and closing ceremonies are usually the same or at least similar in the temple, the eight annual ceremonies are always different. In an interview, Georgina said 'They [ceremonies] are arranged by two different priestesses every time'. She said that the two priestesses prepare for ceremony 'by spending a day together in a kind of meditation'. I was given this example: 'At 11am, we meet for lunch, share ideas and feelings, and connect with the part of the land that corresponds with that Goddess. We create poetry, tell stories, and make up our own aromatherapy oils to dab on everyone so that we can usher in a new energy'. From here, new rituals and ceremonies are devised.

### *The Goddess in Procession*

I attended my first Goddess procession in August 2008; the year when the aspect of the Goddess called the 'Wild Maiden' was being celebrated.



5.12 The Goddess and devotees in procession at Chilkwell Street, Glastonbury

Bowman writes,

each year in rotation a model of the goddess in one of her three aspects – maiden, mother or crone – was made and then displayed in the most public aspect of the event, the procession on the last day of the [Goddess] conference’ (Bowman 2004: 282).

A joyful, colorful and celebratory event, the procession involves the use of hundreds of flags and banners (as exemplified by those created by the ‘Stitchwitch devotee), costumes, candles, singing, and shouting to express devotion to the Glastonbury Goddess. On the whole, the number of female attendants are far more numerous than that of male. In support of this, Bowman writes

The Goddess Procession has its serious moments, but on the whole it is far more ludic than either of the Christian events, with the overwhelmingly female participants often flamboyantly dressed and performing Goddess changes and songs with gusto en route’ (2004: 282).

The Goddess is processed up Glastonbury High Street, to Chalice Well, on the road toward the White Spring, through the White Spring building which has been recently converted into another Goddess temple (although not directly affiliated with the Glastonbury Goddess Temple) with different corridors that correspond to different aspects of the Goddess (and even a God – portrayed as Herne the Hunter), then up the hill to Glastonbury Tor, then back down again.

Bowman says that the procession is

now, in effect, a mirror image of the Christian Pilgrimage processions, in particular the Catholic version that starts from the Tor and proceeds to the Abbey (2004: 283).

Having also attended Christian processions in Glastonbury, I can verify that this is true.

However, the Goddess procession is far more colorful, vibrant, passionate and less reserved than the Anglican and Catholic processions. The passion and 'gusto' as Bowman calls it, which is found in the Goddess procession closely resembles that which is encountered when the Virgin of Alcala is processed around her territory and in the village in Spain.

The Goddess, on this particular year of my attendance, was sat in a kneeling position holding a bowl, again all created out of wicker, was dressed in leopard print materials and had a wild, unkempt, loosely curled red wig on its head. The 'Wild Maiden' Goddess was no larger than a normal sized ten year old girl kneeling in a similar position.



5.13 'Energy buffers' of the Goddess

This statue figure was quite small in comparison to others I have seen which are usually larger, or more 'adult-like' in stature.



5.14 The 2010 Goddess Statue

After the procession stopped, I questioned the two men (illustrated above) who are designated to carry the figure through procession. They told me that they have to be trained for quite some



time in how to deal with all the energy being projected at the figure for two main reasons: the first is because the men have to serve as a kind of 'energy buffer' who are capable of stopping the wild maiden from getting out of control; and secondly, so that they (the two men) do not get thrown off balance energetically and suffer.

When the statue was placed at the pool of water at Chalice Well (the longest stop en route to the top of the Tor), a more solemn mood took over. Singing becomes soft and doleful. Here I observed people touching the wig hair of the wicker figure and kneeling next to her in contemplation and meditation.

Some people kneeled in devotion, and many people took water from the pool at the well and placed it on their faces.



5.15 Devotees at Chalice Well pool with Goddess

After a few words from the founding members and much singing, the crowd broke out into a huge cheer with lots of laughter, and the figure was hoisted back onto the shoulders of her guardians and carriers and taken to the White Spring where she encountered other paintings,

statues and aspects of the Goddess, including one black Madonna. The singing (mainly women) took on a choir like acoustic sound in the White Spring, which was lit with only candles with the sound of running water coming from all directions. The ambience was soft, dark, moist and soothing. All of the devotees in the procession were lined up and walking slowly after the statue through the White Spring.



5.16 Devotee venerating altar in the White Spring during procession

From the White Spring, the statue was processed up the hill to the Tor. I did not go up the Tor due to previously mentioned knee injury; however, I waited for the return of the Goddess in the Goddess Conference headquarters. I had observed that nobody tried particularly hard to touch the Goddess figure while she was in procession, yet when she was returned to the town hall rooms and placed on the floor, that changed significantly. Here, several women at different times went to where the statue sat, pinned and hung things on it such as earrings and clouts, placed pictures and other objects such as stones, feathers and seashells in her bowl, and kneeled in front of her.



Some people kissed their own fingers and transferred the kiss to the statue. This type of devotion and veneration went on all afternoon in varying and similar forms.

### *Demise*

Unlike the cedar statue discussed in the case study of the Virgin of Alcala where the wood is of the best quality due to it needing be durable and more time resistant, the Goddess religion creates its statues out of untreated willow. This is because central to the beliefs of the Glastonbury Goddess religion are renewal, transformation and change, not preservation. Georgina said that this is why when a wicker statue starts to deteriorate it is ceremoniously burned along with the offerings that were left on them. She told me that many women find this ceremonial burning difficult because it reminds them of 'the burning times', i.e. the times when the devotees felt they had been burned as witches in past lives. Because of this a workshop was created after the last goddess statue burning because it 'brought up emotional stuff' for those women.

### *The Goddess Hall*

In addition to the Goddess Temple, there is now also the Goddess Hall in Glastonbury. It was dedicated on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, 2008, after I had done the majority of my fieldwork with the temple. In essence, the Goddess Hall is another temple, yet the Goddess Temple is foundational in the growth and workings of the Glastonbury Goddess religion. The hall is located in another part of the town and serves as a larger venue for ceremonies, rituals, dance, and meditation classes. In the Hall, the eight corners are identified with altars and images of the goddesses who correspond accordingly. What once was a stage in this ex-community center serves as the main altar of the Goddess. Where the wicker figure goddesses in the temple stand between six and seven feet in stature, a larger wicker work figure sits cross legged on the stage/altar in the

Goddess Hall. Herein veneration and devotions also take place, offerings are made and the Goddess is celebrated. The hall is not open daily as is the Goddess Temple. Its main function is to provide a larger space to the Goddess community than the temple previously provided where the public are invited to participate in rituals, dance, ceremonies, healing events, Kundalini yoga classes, and other events.

The opening of the Goddess Hall in 2008 has changed the 'goings on' of the Goddess religion in Glastonbury. The hall was mortgaged and opened to accommodate the growing number of adherents and Goddess devotees in both the town and those who travel in. Now the Goddess Temple off Glastonbury High Street serves as a walk in temple where daily interactions at the altar and with the Goddess figures and the Nine Morgens take place. Instead of the wickerwork willow figures, the painting of the Lady of Avalon now 'holds court' at the center of the altar in the Goddess Temple. The wicker goddess figures stand to the right of the painting. The largest wicker Goddess figure that was once resident in the temple is now resident in the hall. These changes have inspired new and innovative ways of interacting with the Goddess, such as the creation of more workshops many more healing events. These 'new' events also serve as ways to bring more money into the hall and temple. The fact that the Glastonbury Goddess founders now have a mortgage to pay has influenced the amount of paid events that they sponsor in Glastonbury.

*Participant Observation/My experience in ceremony*

At Imbolc (1<sup>st</sup> of February, 2009), I attended the ceremony at the Goddess Hall to participate and observe and see how the materiality in the Temple/Hall is used and engaged. A table had been placed in the middle of the Hall and a clear space had been created around it where many

cushions and sheep skins were on the floor for sitting more comfortably. The table had been divided into eight pie shaped sections and there were doll-like figures dressed as each of the goddesses of the eight points on the Goddess Wheel standing in a circle, backs to each other, at the center of the table. Each doll goddess was facing her particular corresponding direction, and facing the larger images of herself in the Hall. Then I noticed an adorned wooden throne-like chair that had been placed under the direction of Northeast, where Brigit, the Maiden, resides.

Practically all of the attendees were dressed in white, the color of Brigit, including me. There were also seats lined against the walls. When I went to take a seat, I found myself sitting next to an older, long grey haired and bearded man who turned out to be called Electric Gypsy. I then noticed that Electric Gypsy had a doll on his lap. He proceeded to tell me that the doll, a Bridie doll, was a gift from the universe, and he called her 'Love'. As it turns out, he had found the doll on the steps outside the hall. He then insisted on putting the doll on my lap so that I could share in the 'Love'. He then kept calling me goddess, thanking me over and over again for all the good things I had done. This distracted me from fully participating and observing in the ceremony, i.e. although he was harmless, I was on edge and guarded. Then after the fourth hug, and when I was going to try to put some distance between me and him for the sake of my research, the ceremony began.

The opening ceremony began with everyone facing the current direction, then turning clockwise toward the center of the room. All of the people had their hands open to receive the 'energy' of the goddess and the act of turning served to bring it to center of the room where the altar on the round table was set up. The ceremony lasted for over an hour. It included singing, chanting, and group interactions. Mostly, I observed, the Goddess figures and altars were there as

visual stimulus. But as it turns out, according to one of the women I met there (a devotee in her mid-twenties), the statues are there to 'hold the space'.

On another occasion in March, 2008, I had been interviewing Georgina before one of the 'New Moon Oracle' evenings was about to begin in the temple. When I asked if I could be present when the Temple was being set up for oracular use, I was told 'definitely not'. She said that she wanted me to 'experience the magic of the temple'. I gathered that this meant that I was only to see the temple when it was set up and glamorized with candle light and incense, and once the priest and priestess had put on their oracular robes. On this particular instance, I went inside the temple, left five pounds as an offering, and went to hear what the oracle would tell me. During this session, the temple was set up differently and completely changed. A black material partition had been created whereby any oracle seekers had to crawl through a hole in the material where he or she would then sit in the floor between two seated masked people/figures who spoke with strange and altered voices. One of the women's voices had been changed to sound like a kind of cackling crow woman. The masks were white with long pointy noses on (similar to the types of medical masks that would have been worn in times of 18<sup>th</sup> century European bubonic plague), and both people were cloaked from head to toe in black robes. When I sat between them, I was trying not to, but I recognized both figures from time spent in and around the temple. Trying not to let this spoil the occasion, I listened intently to what they said while examining the situation and the how the materiality was used to facilitate the oracular evening, i.e. to create a glamorous air of awe and mystery conducive to oracular 'goings on'. The robes, the ambience and the general atmosphere of the temple changed the temple's function along with more normal function of the priests and priestesses.

## Interpretation of Observations

### *Polytheism or Monotheism?*

The differences in accounts of 'where to find' the Goddess and how to approach her with regards to the temple has continually baffled me throughout this case study. For example, when the statues of the Goddess are referred to as being *representations* of the Goddess, I observe myself thinking (rightly or wrongly) that the underlying structure of the Goddess religion in Glastonbury is constructed and based upon a type of Protestant cultural discourse found in United Kingdom where the transcendent is prized above that which is non-transcendent. This is symptomatic of modernist thought and it is the same culturally modernist yet religious construct that underpins western New Age discourses.

From my own experience in paganism (although I was never part of the Goddess religion), I have always imagined that the Goddess could be understood and/or imagined as monotheistic and/or polytheistic; yet I have become increasingly surprised throughout this research how predominantly monotheistic, and to use Naomi Goldenburg's term 'theological' (1979: 96) the Glastonbury Goddess religion is. In an interview given to by the BBC and reported online, Jones says, 'I think there is one goddess, and she has ten thousand faces' (BBC 2008). Here the deities local to Glastonbury's springs, groves, wells and other parts of the landscape are named and celebrated as separate deities yet they are understood to be 'aspects' of the 'one'. Where one might expect to find clear cases of vernacular polytheism, a form of feminist monotheism is there instead. The ten thousand faces of the one Goddess referred to by Jones are not polytheistic. According to Eller,

In feminist spirituality, this type of polytheism is very unusual [the type that believes that different goddesses who occupy different spaces are no more related than strangers

passing in the street]. Almost all spiritual feminists believe that the relationship between various deities is closer and more significant than this. Many more spiritual feminists collect at the opposite end of the spectrum, where the goddess is worshiped in many aspects and invoked by many names, but in front of the practitioner's consciousness is the conviction that the goddess is truly one (Eller, 1995: 133).

It can be suggested that when one refers to 'the Goddess' in Glastonbury, either one is referring to all of them as one, a particular 'face' of the Goddess that 'resonates' with an individual devotee, or with the goddess that is being celebrated at that particular point in the wheel of the year. For example, one of my informants – Georgina - told me that her favorite deity is Keridwen, the dark mother, and that she feels 'more connected to the Goddess during that season', which is late autumn around the 31<sup>st</sup> of October. This informant says she 'resonates' with Keridwen. On another occasion Kathy Jones said she 'resonates' with Rhiannon. This type of 'resonation' with different aspects of the Goddess is very common in the Goddess complex.

My urge as a researcher here is to say that although they claim to be more or less monotheistic, their actions, behaviors and relational resonances with particular deities implies a religion of a more polytheistic nature. This is because the individual goddesses are connected with varying parts of Glastonbury's surrounding landscape that are strongly defined as having real senses of place, i.e. where the numinous (Otto, 1958 ) is said to be experienced by many people from many traditions. However, for the sake of taking the stories told by informants seriously, I will resist the urge to cite unreflective assumptions, but will, rather, take what informants say about their own religion as true to how it really is for them. Frustrating that it is for me as a researcher, I have concluded that as the stories surrounding the mythology of Glastonbury (both old and newly created) interweave and overlap, discrepancies will arise. They

do not, however appear to burden devotees. I imagine that the response to my probing for details might be 'But it's all the Goddess'. This last demonstrates the complexity and the diversity of this case study.

Georgina's phrase 'Bartering with the Goddess is tricky business' implies that there is respect and almost fear of the power of the Goddess. This also suggests that the Glastonbury Goddess religion shares similar characteristics with other monotheistic faiths. However, entering into negotiations with her seems permissible, especially when, but not limited to, things of a practical value to the temple are being offered. But one of the main reasons the Goddess is made offerings to and called upon is for acts of aid in healing. This is an important aspect and focus of not only the Glastonbury Goddess religion, but in feminist spirituality in general. Eller says,

In spiritual feminist thought, it is a given that all women need healing: if not from specific illnesses or infirmities, then from the pains suffered as a result of growing up female in a patriarchal world. Spiritual feminists aspire to healing themselves and their sisters through a variety of less than medically and psychotherapeutically orthodox techniques, including homeopathy, chakra balancing, massage, Bach flower remedies, acupuncture, and so on (Eller, 1995: 1096).

Exemplifying this, I received a circular email promoting the

Ceremonial Goddess Healing Day where three to four people work together with one patient. We begin by calling in the presence of the Goddess, as well as healing angels, guides and guardians, to help heal the person. We then lay healing hands on the aura or the body, and sound with the breath to help clear blockages and resistances. We also work with drums, rattles, gong, singing bowls and bells. This short, but very effective



healing experience has benefited many people who have enjoyed being bathed in the Goddess's healing energies. On this special Ceremonial day all those in need of healing will be lead first of all through a cleansing process, so that they can come into the body, open their hearts and prepare themselves to receive the healing that they need. Patients will be cleansed/smudged with healing incenses, then blessed with fire and water, and ceremonially prepared to receive deep energetic healing from Temple Healers, Priestesses and Melissas, who are giving their time freely on this healing day (Jones, K., accessed 23 March 2009).

The emphasis found on healing within the Goddess religion shares many characteristics with both the New Age and with Catholic Mary devotion. As there is no doctrine or particular way to 'do' the Goddess religion, it can be done in just about any way the devotee pleases. This begs the question: What are the limits, and if there are any, how are they imposed? Whereas founders such as Kathy Jones come along and create texts that are used as guides to the Glastonbury Goddess religion, the answer is that this religiosity is subjective and experiential as would be expected from a new religious movement such as this.

### *Interpretation of Offerings*

Relationships with the Goddess are solidified and made physical through the acts of making offerings, caring for the temple, and having daily interactions with the goddesses and the materiality found within the temple. These acts root devotees further into a more personal relationship with the divine and facilitate reciprocity at the altar. The figures of the Goddess become relational objects that are treated as *subjects* (instead of objects) as indicated by the cyclical and reciprocal processes fostered by devotee, offering, and the deity of devotion.

Offerings given to the Goddess, or left at the altar of the temple, vary as much in materials as they do in creativity, and it can be suggested that an overall rubric is followed that is reflected by the aesthetics and arrangement of objects on the Goddesses and the altar found in the temple. Within the creativity of offerings to the Goddess, there are limits dictated by the appreciation and value for those things that are either found in nature (acorns, hazelnuts, pine cones, wild flowers, berries, etc.), created from natural materials of and generally of non-economic value (generally wood), or are indigenous to the land around Glastonbury. I am suggesting that offerings are also inspired by what can be considered normative forms of Goddess Pagan materiality (goddess statues, crystals, etc), or are personal (jewelry worn by a devotee, photos of loved ones ill or deceased). Georgina said that certain objects left as offerings are 'politely removed, especially if they are weird things'. I was given the example of a hair dresser's mannequin head that was left on the altar at one stage and how she and Jones decided to remove it. Offerings are important to this research because they express the relationships, hopes, and expectations shared between both devotees and deities. Through offerings, negotiations take place at the altars of the Goddess which indicate the types of relationships had. These observations form an important part of Chapter 7 and my conclusions.

## Chapter 6

### *Relationships, Relating, Relationality*

While the next and final chapter discusses the roles that offerings play in the shrine of the Virgin and the temple of the Goddess, this chapter discusses the roles that statues play through the concept of 'relationality'. Following animist discourses, it examines the ontological possibilities that emerge when persons (human persons and statue persons) enter into relationships with one another. In other words, *the relationships are the ontologies*. This assertion is vital to the theoretical position of the thesis and does two things: First, supported by the ways in which the Virgin and the Goddess are treated and engaged in the ethnographic accounts, it expands on questions of objects, potential agency, subjecthood and personhood through applying it to statues of the Virgin and the Goddess (and other religious objects) in the religiosities discussed here. Secondly, by engaging and expanding on the concept of statue focused representation, relationality builds on and complements the theoretical propositions made by advocates of the new animism such as Harvey (2005b), and others who have adopted relational stances such as Vivieros de Castro's 'ontological perspectives' (2004), Gell's exploration into the roles of 'idols' (1998), Scott's 'ontological emergence' (2006), and Ingold's idea of the meshwork (2011).

The challenge of this chapter is not to establish that objects have agency in terms of a 'social life' (Appadurai, 1986) where human relationships are facilitated by some form of exchange. As we have seen in the literature review, scholars have already done this. Nor is it to assert that 'statues' are animated and living all the time, at least not in the sense that biological beings are. Agency is not always representational of human intentionality (although sometimes it is). The challenge of this chapter is to establish how animism works in terms of objects/statues having

agency in moments of active, relational engagement, a fact that both incorporates and challenges ideas such as representation. Incorporating all objects, whether religious or 'everyday', animism approached in this way can be applied across a broad spectrum of contexts, cultures and worldviews, or better yet 'worlds'. That is religious objects are capable of demonstrating the exaggerated roles of objects due to how they are perceived, engaged, valued, and what they 'represent' to their devotees.

### *The Problem of Duality*

The ways in which devotees of the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess engage their statues challenge the ideal types of that which constitutes modernity, theology, and canonized scholarly categorizations which are often based on commonly accepted dualistic constructs. Statues of the Virgin and the Goddess are theoretically/doctrinally perceived by scholars and theologians as being representations of the divine instead of, for example, being recognized and received as the tangible, embodied, relational participants in ceremony and ritual that they are (at least for the practitioners that enter into relationships and negotiations with them). Questions pertaining to issues of transcendence and immanence, i.e. whether or not images/statues are capable of housing the divine, being present in the divine (even if momentarily), actually *being* the divine, symbolizing or representing the divine underpin the problem of religious materiality specifically. Yet as suggested in the introduction, the problem of materiality is better understood when referred to as the 'problem of duality'.

When the practices and beliefs that accompany everyday religion are examined, the observation can be made that what are generally considered fixed dualistic categories, subjects and objects, mind and matter, symbolic action and 'real' action, and the 'sacred' and 'profane'

are not fixed statuses at all. In addition to modernity, Ingold notes 'culture is conceived to hover over the material world but not permeate it' (2000:240). 'Culture', 'modernity', 'ritual and belief', even 'materiality' are elitist constructs that only partially bear resemblances to that which happens in the lived reality of everyday practices and interactions. Typically, rituals are understood to be public affairs while beliefs are private and personal (Harvey, 2005a: 1). Yet as illustrated in the literature review, ritual and belief, bound by the embodiment of performed action, yet often set on separate trajectories, are mutually informative and cannot be divorced from one another. Harvey writes 'What people do and why they do it (their motivations and their sincerity) are linked (2005a: 1). The stasis extracted from making dualistic distinctions is abstract and illusory and not capable of containing, sustaining (or controlling) the volition of relational engagement, or *matter*. Solutions to the 'problem of duality' can, however, be found in the unique, volatile, diverse relationships that take place in religious *living* contexts, not only in Western European religiosities such as in the cases of the Virgin and the Goddess, but in other cultures where religious foci takes center stage and is engaged and/or venerated such as, for example, in the similar cases of Hindu *murtis*, statues of the Buddha, or Santeria altars that 'house' gods. As this chapter reveals, the roles that religious matter play are not so problematic once the limitations to which they have been generally relegated are broadened to accept further, more relational possibilities.

### *Relationality*

Relationality is dependent on three things: relationships, performances, and the moment. It is a practice, a *co-inspired form of active, mutual relating* that emerges from the unique, personal, even intimate relationships that take place between human and other than human beings rather than a religious label, an ethic, or a worldview. Relationality is animist in both theory and

encounter. It asserts that moments of active relating contain the possibility of bringing 'persons' into 'liveliness' or *being* insofar as we are relating with them, not before, not after (which also extends to temporal relating). In other words, ontologies emerge in moments of active, relational engagement. This is built on both Harvey's (2005b) 'new' version of animism and Scott's (2006) idea of ontological emergence which will now be addressed.

According to Harvey, this new version is about recognising that the world is full of persons, some of which are human, others of which are not. It is not so much concerned with how persons come into being as it with how those persons are to be behaved toward (2005b: xi). Personhood is a status that depends on relational engagement. Further, inferred human likeness is not a prerequisite for animism and/or personhood. Harvey says that the new animism is 'less about attributing life and/or human-likeness, than it is about seeking better forms of personhood in relationships' (2005b: 16). How, then, do we know when something is a person or an object (who is a potential person)? In using the example of stones, Harvey says,

If not all stones are alive 'but some are', how does someone encountering a stone tell the difference? It certainly makes a difference, not only grammatically and in other speech acts, but also in the way a stone is treated. People are spoken with and acted towards differently than objects (2005: 36).

Thus, we can distinguish between persons and objects through the ways in which objects are treated. Like materiality generally, the idea of personhood is problematic for academics and modernist observers. A general modern assumption is that for something to be alive, it must do something or have some kind of behaviour, but this is not precisely true. From an animist perspective, all something needs to be 'alive' is for someone to relate to it, have a relationship

with it, or treat it particular ways that point toward subjecthood instead of 'objecthood'. Harvey says,

The seductive mistake throughout these debates is to think of bounded subjects, individuals and nominative linguistic constructions as central. If anacondas can sometimes act as shamans, and if the animation of rocks remains only theoretical until particular rocks and particular humans (or particular Thunderers) relate with them, kettles could also be considered persons when they do whatever it would take kettles to do to demonstrate liveliness – and all it might take is for someone to address the kettle as "Thou" rather than an "it" (2005b: 111).

Personhood can therefore be achieved through how a so called object is addressed. As will be discussed later on, this is one of the many ways in which treatment exemplifies the relational quality of animism.

Scott's (2006) idea of ontological emergence shares many similarities with the new animism and serves as a further foundation upon which the concept of relationality has been built. Scott writes,

The attribution of life to the non-living is not what occurs in a world perceived as so many different modalities of life, of emergence. In such a world, figurative practice is rather to understand the differences among beings in the world as variations on the underlying themes of life in community. For my Cree interlocutors, the world is a place of deep vitality, sometimes restful, sometimes dynamic; pregnant with possibility; a place of emergent, often orderly, sometimes surprising phenomena. Life in this sense, *pimaatsiwin*, was translated to me as 'the continuous birthing of the world' (Scott, 2006: 61).



The Cree idea of 'the continuous birthing of the world' shares similarities with Ingold's (2011: 28) 'world-in-formation' (discussed in greater detail below) and also reflects the nature of animist relationality. Reliant upon relational engagement, Scott's ontological emergence indicates a *simultaneous* coming into being of persons and things. While this idea of simultaneous coming into being supports the concept of relationality, relationships with the Virgin and the Goddess also indicate cases of *deliberate* coming into being. This is demonstrated through the intentionality involved in performances and other venerative acts which take place in shrine and temple settings. Relational engagement is intentional, not a spontaneous inevitability. Although the presence of human-like features on statues of the Virgin and the Goddess might affect the ways in which they are automatically perceived, the attribution of 'liveliness' cannot be assumed as each relational encounter is unique to what persons 'bring' to encounters.

Relationality is an aspect of Western animism because it is a modern response to being in the presence of statues despite doctrine or other theoretical implications. In its flexibility, it is a deliberate occurrence that cuts into both Catholic shrine and Goddess Temple experiences. That is, people act differently in the presence of statues and when they are participating in relational temple/shrine encounters than when they are, say, at home or going about 'ordinary' life. This understanding results in opening up a kind of ontological relationality that gives fair and distributed importance to human persons and object persons within cultural discourses that often view object persons in direct contrast with human persons, i.e. what it means to be a human being is directly opposed to what it means to be an object.

To further illustrate the concept of relationality, an example is offered that demonstrates how ontologies emerge. I may live with a small statue of the Buddha that is placed on my personal altar inside my house. Arguably, that object is not 'living' until I have picked it up and engaged

with it in some way. Consequently, from the perspective of the statue maybe I am not living until I pick it up, too. Engaging with it in ways such as cleaning, admiring, or changing its location can potentially 'activate' the statue so that it can be used in ritual or meditation. I can speculate that when I am not using it, it is dormant, or sleeping. Yet the perspective of this Buddha statue is unknown to me. Here, what we need to know is that subjecthood, is achieved when objects and subjects (human and other than human) both become subjects by bringing each other into a unique form of co-inspired, co-relational being. In this view, representation can only ever be partial. So whereas Tylor (1913 [1871]) argued that animism is a belief in spiritual beings and that within animistic practices, life and spirits are attributed to objects which make them animate (1913 [1871], I: 426-9) it is argued here that if we engage in real encounters, or relationships, with objects, then the *act* of relating becomes the animating quality, i.e. through the acts of speaking, touching, or simply being in the presence of. Mitchell writes,

Statues are not merely artifacts, but are substantive embodiments of saintly presence, which are both conduits of spiritual power and agents of such power in and of themselves. They are agents, in the sense understood by Gell (1988), endowed with the capacity to act, and their presence is confirmed both through being performed with, and through their own performances. As such, they combine *praesentia* and potential-presence and power-to unite transcendence and immanence (2009: 275).

Ingold's (2011) meshwork can further be applied to the actions that take place in shrine and temple settings through the fluid, relational lines of SPIDER. Ingold says, 'Every such line describes a flow of material substance in a space that is topologically fluid' (2011: 64). Whereas 'actor network theory' (Latour, 2005) implies straight, rigid lines of connectivity which

emphasize the actors, i.e. the people or things that are connected, SPIDER's meshwork emphasizes the acts of connection and relationship, the actual relating. 'Meshwork is the 'web of life', not a network of connected points, but a meshwork of interwoven lines' (Ingold, 2011: 63).

Statues of the Virgin and the Goddess can take on their own animated qualities, not only through the expectations that devotees bring to them, but through historical contexts, their display, the offerings that are visible supporting testimonials to their power, and their presences within their shrine and temple settings. These lines on the web of SPIDER are contextual lines, i.e. these things (offerings, statues, stories) are interwoven into moments of active relating. Like caring for a newly planted sapling, the 'liveliness' of the Goddess and the Virgin emerges with the momentary nourishment of relationships and devotion. Ingold writes

It has been conventional to describe animism as a system of belief that imputes life to inert objects. But... such imputation is more typical of people in western societies who dream of finding life on other planets than of indigenous peoples to whom the label of animism has been generally applied. These peoples are united not in their belief but in a way of being that is alive and open to a world in continuous birth. In this animic ontology, beings do not propel themselves across a ready-made world but rather issue forth through a world-in-formation, along the lines of their relationships (Ingold, 2011: 66).

As mentioned before, this 'world-in-formation' discussion of Ingold's reflects the nature of relationality, i.e. if relationality is about ontological emergence in moments of active relating, then the implication is that relationality is in constant process of being and becoming.

Relationality continually re-invents itself with each individual encounter. This also bears the

implication that the concept of agency is also regenerative and dependent upon active relational encounter. Ingold refers to agency thus:

the material world can only be brought back to life in the dreams of theorists by conjuring a magical mind-dust that, sprinkled among its constituents, is supposed to set them physically in motion (2011: 28).

This is because theorists cannot actually define the meaning of 'agency'. Due to its relational, volatile nature it remains mystified and mysterious. Attributing this kind of 'fairy dust' agency to beings who are non-organisms, i.e. who do not have skill and who do not grow (2011: 94) may appear illogical to Ingold. Yet the case of statues is different. As Gell suggests, the agency that puts statues on the move is *religious* (1998: 99). From a modernist perspective, this could be equalled to sprinkling the fairy dust of agency on statues, but to devotees of religious statues, maintaining relationships is a significant factor in their faith (and who can argue with faith?).

So how is this concept of relationality applied to the case studies? Due to the impact of modernity and the nature of Enlightenment rationality, epistemologies and ontologies often complement, conflict, and collide. Devotees know that they venerate a 'devotional', a 'statue', '*un imagen*', or what is meant to be a 'representation', yet this appears to be of little importance to the actual relationships they have with their statues. It is within this complex zone of relationality where solutions can be found that help broaden the concept of 'representation'.

Viveiros de Castro criticizes 'representation', saying

my problem with the concept of representation is the ontological poverty it implies — a poverty characteristic of modernity. The Cartesian break with medieval scholasticism produced a radical simplification of European ontology by positing only two principles or substances: unextended thought and extended matter. Modern thought began with that

simplification; and its massive conversion of ontological into epistemological questions (questions of representation) is still with us, a conversion prompted by the fact that every mode of being not assimilable to obdurate 'matter' had to be swallowed up by 'mind' (2004a: 482).

As Viveiros de Castro says, questions of representation are still with us. They are highly influential in how religious objects such as images and statues are understood. This is where relationality makes an advance. As mentioned previously, in the classic, Tylorean (1913 [1871]) understandings of animism, alien spirits take up residence in things of nature and matter. In contrast, Western animist relationality depends on relational encounters. It is not restricted to the theoretical confines of 'spirits' and matter, subjects and objects, or other dualisms, yet theoretically, it is capable of including these distinctions and more. Due to the epistemological nature of Catholicism and Goddess Paganism where statues and images are often referred to and theologically understood to be representations, Western animist relationality is so relational that sometimes Tylor's (1913 [1871]) animism might be more appropriate than the new version to account for the ways in which statues are related to and interacted with. Although I engage the term 'embodiment' to indicate either the location of spirits/deities in matter where statues embody power in contrast to statues being referents to or 'representations' of power, they are both fluid and contextual terms, dependent on the quality of the moment. This understanding forms a core aspect of the concept of relationality and has inspired a 'new' definition of fetishism.

Similarly as I argue with regards to animism, it appears that there is not much room for discussing the transformative roles of matter without returning to the fetish. More than it being sought out by the researcher on her journey, the fetish has managed to find the researcher time

and time again. Yet the concept of the fetish betrays itself. It does exactly what it should not do. In one word it neatly packages the messiness that classifications such as 'object/subject' and 'spirit/matter' do not adequately survey. Applied to statues of the Virgin and the Goddess, this new kind of fetishism emerges as a sub-species of animism and it pushes animist relationality to its limits: statues of the Virgin and the Goddess are so relational that they can be inherently/independently powerful, representational, or both simultaneously. This assertion depends not only on the fact that statues are relational, but on *the manner in which* they are related to, i.e. through attributing and/or acknowledging the power of the Virgin and the Goddess, devotees become, in some sense, subordinate. This distinction indicates a 'fetishist relationality' which occurs when devotees relate to objects/statues as inherently powerful. Hence, the relationships and performances that take place in relation to the Virgin and the Goddess inform us about the powerful personhood of matter/statues. Defined as such, the fetish further broadens the parameters of relational engagement to include the possibility of matter having its own powerful agenda.

Vernacular Catholicism (or the *lived* reality of Catholicism) is usually a combination of popular piety and doctrinal protocol which means the way in which materiality is engaged varies from place to place. While popular piety and doctrinal protocol are on a continuum, i.e. they are separate but complementary, interwoven and mutually informative. This makes the kinds of devotions that take place not only unknowable to outsiders, but also unpredictable. For example, the Virgin of Alcala is embodied when she is being engaged, addressed and treated as a living, breathing woman. This is 'unofficial'. To attribute power to a statue is, officially, idolatry. In these moments can also be that which she is doctrinally said to represent, i.e. the 'universal Mary'. She can also be engaged as if she only representation. This depends on who or what is

doing the relating. Thus, the status of the Virgin is relational, making her changeable with each personal, devotional encounter within her overriding roles as universal divine mother and intercessor.

The *theology* surrounding Goddess worship is more flexible than Catholic theology. In theory, the Glastonbury Goddess is more relational than the Virgin of Alcala. For example, Glastonbury Goddess Pagans discuss their statues in terms of both embodiment *and* representation without fear of theological repercussions. Georgina said the Goddess embodies the figures in the temple, while others said that the figures are representations of the Goddess. Further, as we have seen in the ethnographic accounts, the Goddess is 'called into the temple' so that she may take up residence daily. Then, she is ritually dismissed, or 'let go', in the evening to 'rest'. The Goddess is also said to 'hover' above Glastonbury and be present in the land simultaneously. The transcendent, hovering Goddess is ritually controlled as to how and when she enters the temple, 'bides' as devotees say, and is embodied in the statues (or not, depending on who or what is doing the relating). In moments of active relating, the case of the Glastonbury Goddess is one of Pels' animistic 'spirit *in* matter' (1998: 91), i.e. the spirit or deity is in the land, but also hovering above it, ritually brought in to inhabit the temple and the statues, is said to move through the physical forms of the statues, then let go of the evening. This flexibility of spirit/the divine taking up residence in matter is one of *theological* freedom where monotheism and polytheism are interchangeable.

Statues of the Virgin and the Goddess are treated as gods (or goddesses or virgins as the case may be). Ideally, this would be true of the Glastonbury Goddess religion. Yet due to her existence in a predominantly Protestant country, research found that the Goddess is referred to more often as a representation than embodied. Contrasted with the Virgin of Alcala, the *Santero*

told me that this particular statue of the Virgin has power (*'ella tiene el poder'*). I found that his belief reflects a common understanding of the statue. Although devotees know that the statue is a statue and a supposed representation of the universal Virgin Mary, her local, vernacular form is treated and addressed otherwise. As Holbraad said about the powder of Cuban diviners *being* power (2007), in this case the statue *is* power. If fetishism is defined as a discourse with which to understand the power of matter (acknowledging that Catholic devotees of the Virgin of Alcala do not self-identify as fetishists), then the role of matter in this case is fetishistic. The *Santero* said that the Virgin grants miracles, and if she does not want to grant a petition or request, then she will not do it. Theologically, Mary is intercessor. Because of her role as the mother of Christ, she only has the power to petition Christ, who then will petition God on behalf of his mother (who hears the pleas and prayers of devotees). This attributes power to the actual statue deity rather than to God. If the Virgin has power of her accord (independent of Jesus or God), then this exemplifies the case of Pels' fetishistic 'spirit of matter' (1998: 91) and further brings into question the power relations that take place between devotees and statues, a matter of which will be addressed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Relationality is such that it also extends to temporality. Although this thesis is mainly focused on what happens when devotees are in the presence of the Goddess or the Virgin of Alcala, what happens temporally and when devotees are not in the presence of the statues must also be addressed. The personal, intimate relationships that devotees have while they are in the presence of the Virgin and Goddess figures might take on different qualities to those that occur when devotees are at distances from the shrine and temple. For example, when a person thinks about the Virgin and the Goddess and crosses him or herself or makes an offering, does that remembrance and action activate the object person and help them come into being? Specifically,



do the souvenirs that are bought from the shrine or temple that bear the images of the statues have the same power as the statues themselves, or are these replicas of replicas? Although these objects can be bought at the shrine and temple, they will certainly bear personal, intimate meanings for those who have visited the shrine or Temple and carried them away. Their presence and the fact they are bought, sold, and given as gifts, can, however, be understood as other forms of active, temporal relating that help maintain relationships with the Virgin and the Goddess.

### *Statue persons*

Building on Harvey's animism (2005b), persons are made and/or brought into being in several different ways, all of which aid in the emergence of ontological possibilities found in relational engagement. Personhood is a process. Persons emerge through treatment, the ways in which they are addressed, and through the relationships that ensue accordingly. This is how statues become subjective, relational participants in ritual, ceremony and everyday religious activities.

Employing Hallowell's (1960) idea of personhood, the Virgin and the Goddess can be considered *statue persons*. The raw materials used in the actual making of statues/statue persons will now be considered as a significant factor in the process of testing the role that materiality plays in the shrine of the Virgin and the Goddess temple. The actual composition of statues and some of the ways in which they literally become persons, indeed, communal and private relations, will now be addressed.

In the cases studies, all the physical forms of the deities started as wood that was then shaped into human-like figures. The potentiality of personhood was already present in their 'raw material' form. How is it that human made 'things', or artefacts, created from wood become

sacred focuses of adoration? What are the 'steps to sacrality' that raw materials must undergo? How is the wood chosen? How do carved and woven forms achieve statuses that make them worthy of either embodying or representing the divine (or both), or even having their own power? According to Ingold (2011), we must look to their properties to see their 'stories', not what humans attribute to them. He writes

Thus the properties of materials, regarded as constituents of an environment, cannot be identified as fixed, essential attributes of things, but are rather processual and relational. They are neither objectively determined nor subjectively imagined but practically experienced. In that sense, every property is a condensed story. To describe the properties of materials is to tell the stories of what happens to them as they flow, mix and mutate (2011: 30).

Materials are specifically chosen in both of the case studies because their properties contain spiritual significance. Yet arguably, the question must be asked as to whether or not it was the materials that choose the creators of the statues, the creators that choose the materials, or a relational combination of both? I suggest the latter. The properties of materials, and their place within the meshwork, choose the creators of objects just as much as the creators (who also form part of the meshwork) choose them.

In terms of materials, the statue of the Virgin of Alcala is made from cedar and then painted. Cedar is used in the creation of many Catholic statues not only because of its durable, hard qualities, but also because it is mentioned several times throughout the Bible, usually in reference to the most famous Cedar of Lebanon. Cedar is also an expensive wood. The quality of the wood reflects the preciousness of the statue. The Goddess figures are continually created by a

woman artist who is a Glastonbury Goddess devotee. I called her once to arrange an interview for when she was back in Glastonbury. I left her my phone number but she never returned my call. It was important for me to reach this artist so that I could better understand the ways in which the statues are made, i.e. like the painter of the Lady of Avalon, does this artist go into a trance-like state during the creative process, or does she perform any kind of ritual in preparation for sourcing the willow? Whether or not these things occur would have been useful to this thesis in terms of understanding how raw materials are transformed into objects of devotion. I do know, however, Georgina that the Goddess figures are woven from willow that is sourced locally from the Somerset levels and that it has a 'powerful connection with water'. This is important for this group as the land surrounding Glastonbury *is* the Goddess. Therefore, it is speculated here, that the willow used to make the figures is part of 'her'. When people relate to the figures in the Temple, they are relating to a physical aspect of the Goddess. Georgina expressed her belief that this use of indigenous materials helps promote the indigenous 'feeling' of the whole religiosity. I suggest that using locally sourced materials also helps promote vernacular re-territorialization of the Goddess religion in Glastonbury.

The creation of statues, or the literal making of gods, is, as Graeber might say, 'pure social creativity' (2005: 411). Through different processes, these wooden figures became valuable to the communities within which they were situated. Indeed they began to receive devotion, veneration, and gifts. The Glastonbury Goddess statues and the statue of the Virgin of Alcala are/were made, in theory, as copies of envisaged otherworldly prototypes, yet they are treated physically as divine royalty. Once constructed, they are thought to contain supernatural power. Statues of the Goddess and Virgin are said to protect, to heal, to perform miracles, or to help, for example, provide claims to lands lost to historical disruptions, and one can negotiate with them.

Somehow, these figures began to inspire reverence and respect, and hold positions of spiritual governance and dominion over their locales. Further, when religious statue persons are made, so are, in some respects, relations. Although statue persons are worshipped, they also occupy social roles and central positions in their respective religious communities. They are created and used in ways that might be responsible for the consequent formation of social relations amongst human persons, and they are also things that become significant to their communities through their making, position, and the repetitive actions that people have with them thereafter. If we once again trust the etymology of the fetish, i.e. 'that which is made' (Johnson, 2000: 229), and consider the possibility that statues are 'fetishized' in the Marxist sense, a helpful pattern emerges. Graeber (2005) writes,

We create things, and then, because we don't understand how we did it, we end up treating our own creations as if they had power over us. We fall down and worship that which we ourselves have made (2005: 411).

Cedar statues of Mary and willow figures of the Goddess have fetishistic value in the Marxist sense where statues bear qualities, or essences, of their creators. As the creator of the painting in the Goddess Temple indicated, she has a relationship with her own divinely inspired creation and that relationship originates from the essences and peculiarities of her labour. In the case of the Virgin of Alcala, the statue has relationally taken on power that is both external and alien (theological Mary), and internalized (the statue *is* power). The intentions of each individual who encounter the Goddess or the Virgin in moments of active relating can be understood to outweigh, replace and alienate the intentions of the non-present creators of the statues. This is not to say that the essence of a statue maker cannot be present in a statue, but when a religious

object is fashioned so that it may be a copy of a prototype, the rules must change. The intentionality of religious statue creation must involve a certain amount of intentional alienation so that, as we have seen in the account of Caroline, the creator of the Goddess painting, the deity can settle into his or her physical form. Artists and creators of religious objects must step back and away from their creation in order to make them deity-worthy.

### *Physical characteristics*

It has already been mentioned that for something to have personhood, the presence of human characteristics are not necessary. Yet human features such as eyes, hands, mouths, countenances, and gendered form are clearly present physical aspects of the Virgin and the Goddess. Arguably, these iconic features, uniquely local, carved and created, affect presence, agency and relationships within the contexts of each religiosity. Gell considers 'externalist' and 'internalist' theories of agency to account for those idols *who have eyes*. Apart from the animacy attributed to them by human persons, religious statues are capable of a reflexive type of 'interiority' which signifies 'the possession of mind and intentionality' (1998: 136). This provides Harvey's idea of personhood with a different angle. If personhood works with stones and other non anthropoid objects in other indigenous contexts, it works particularly well when applied to anthropoid statues in Western religious indigenous contexts.

It might take quite a leap to come to terms with the fact that stones can be persons. It is, however, less of a leap to consider how anthropoid statue persons can be persons. Devotees treat, respond to, dress, adorn, address, and generally relate to statues of the divine (in Western Europe) as if they are persons/people in the biological sense. They are given jewelry made for

humans and dressed in different sized versions of human-like clothes. Gell (1998) writes in relation to images and icons:

The basic thesis of this work, to recapitulate, is that works of art, images, icons, and the like have to be treated, in the context of an *anthropological* theory, as person-like; that is, sources of, and targets for, social agency. In this context, image-worship has a central place, since nowhere are images more obviously treated as human persons than in the context of worship and ceremonies (1998: 6).

It has been demonstrate through the ethnographic accounts that the Virgin and the Goddess are spoken about, directly to, and treated as if they embody female deities. These actions (bathing, dressing, singing to) go beyond symbolism and into 'real action'. It is not symbolic. It is not 'pretend' or, as Gell says, 'make believe' (1998: 134). In relation to what he calls 'problem of idolatry (1998: 135), he writes

The essence of idolatry is that it permits *real physical interactions* to take place between persons and divinities. To treat such interactions as 'symbolic' is to miss the point (1998: 135).

Take for example, the *Santero's* reference to the Virgin as *ella* (she). Like Harvey's kettles, statues of the Goddess and the Virgin of Alcala are spoken to and about in ways which are similar to how humans speak to or about other humans. The act of dressing the Virgin is also indicative of a kind of gender specific anthropomorphized animacy. The Virgin of Alcala has female undergarments made especially for her small frame. When she is being dressed she is made aware of the next movements, as doctors might make patients continually aware of their

intentions. The *camaristas* say, 'Now we are going to move your arms so that we can put this over you'. Further, because the Virgin is a *virgin*, they protect her modesty when she is being bathed. Yolanda (one of the *camaristas*) said that during the act of bathing, some of the women hold a sheet up so that the statue does not feel vulnerable while she is naked. The women who hold up the sheet look away respectfully and do not watch the others who are doing the bathing. This is so that so many eyes are not on the Virgin's 'naked' form at the same time. When asked about this, the *camaristas* said that they treat her like a woman would want to be treated, and they know this from their own experiences as women. These objects are treated, dressed and performed for in female gendered ways. There must have been a point when the material of statues went from being 'it' gender neutral to being 'she' gender specific. Perhaps 'she' (the Goddesses or the Virgin) began to emerge as a feminine statue-person when the willow or cedar used in the statue's creations began to take on human-like characteristics. Yet her full 'being' might not have emerged until 'she' was situated in context in her shrine or temple and began to receive veneration. This will never be known to anyone, but it will suffice to say that when statue persons come into being, it is a processional, creative occurrence founded on the active and temporal relationships between those who create and love them and the statues themselves.

Further, when, as stated in the ethnographic account, the Virgin of Alcala is being bathed and dressed by the *camaristas*, they speak to her saying, 'Aren't you beautiful today'. They also make a fuss when changing the small statue of the baby Jesus that the Virgin holds, saying 'Hold still and stop squirming, son!' They speak to him like they would a baby of human flesh. This change in language forms a significant part of this project as it not only expresses animacy through relational language patterns with statues and objects, but it informs us as to the nature of our own modern consciousness and how we relate with objects in Western religious discourses.

Applicable to the venerative practices that take place around the Virgin and Goddess, in relation to Hindu *murti* statue devotion, Gell says

It is surely irrational, or at least strange, to speak to, offer food to, dress and bathe a mere piece of sculpture, rather than a living breathing human being. And so it is: those who do these things are just as aware of the 'strangeness' of their behavior as we are, but they also hold, which we do not, that the cult of the idol is religiously efficacious, and will result in beneficial consequences for themselves and the masters they serve in their capacity as priests (1998: 122).

This kind of reflexive understanding referred by Gell is commonplace among devotees found in both religiosities discussed in this thesis. Although this is not a thesis founded on psychological or cognitive theories, I am proposing that Western animism now be considered as two things: first, it is a mutual response between devotees and statues which is aided by the statues' human characteristics. Second, and as a departure from Piaget's (1929) animism where children are thought to be naturally animistic until they grow into a more sophisticated knowledge about the world, I argue that animism is a self conscious choice in light of adult or mature understandings of the world. So if Guthrie (1993) argues that animism is a form of projection that occurs naturally, or spontaneously, instead of a conscious choice to see the world animistically, I am arguing that in the cases of the Goddess and the Virgin devotees of these statues choose to be devotees. It is not the same as when humans encounter animals and anthropomorphize, or when they speak about their cars as being able to perform animal like sounds. In moments of statue devotion, devotees both animate and anthropomorphize simultaneously. Likewise, if statues are



persons (albeit divine and powerful) and are treated accordingly, then they, too, must have choices in their responses to devotees. They must have their own perspectives.

### *Perspectives*

Persons have what Viveiros de Castro (2000, 2004a) calls 'perspectives'. The vast amount of ontological possibilities present in Viveiros de Castro's 'perspectives' encompass a large area where continuums of kinship and relations are possible. Based on the Amerindian conception, ontological perspectivism asserts 'a spiritual unity and a corporeal diversity' (2000: 470). Gell tells us that 'Idols, in other words, are not depictions, not portraits, but (artefactual) *bodies*' (1998: 98). Comparing European discourses with Amerindian cosmologies, Viveiros de Castro asserts that every creature, plant, object and stone (or lots of different bodies) have 'perspectives', and that humans and other than humans have perspectives from the points of view of the unique compositions of their bodies. He writes,

Thus, what I call 'body' is not a synonym for distinctive substance or fixed shape; it is an assemblage of affects or ways of being that constitute a *habitus*. Between the formal subjectivity of souls and the substantial materiality of organisms, there is thus an intermediate plane which is occupied by the body as a bundle of affects and capacities and which is the origin of perspectives (2004a: 475).

Yet he says that for something to have a 'perspective' or a 'point of view', it must have a 'soul' (2004a: 482). Ontological perspectivism is not the same as ontological emergence. Statues do not have 'souls' in the same way that human persons and non-human persons (such as animals) have souls. Yet this conception is here expanded upon to include statue persons who do have a type of *body*. Spiritual unity is found within the religious cultures of devotees of the Virgin and the

Goddess, and corporeal diversity is found in both the bodies *and cultures* of devotees and statues. Because statues of the Virgin and the Goddess are treated as persons capable of either housing, embodying, or representing the otherworldly, or the divine, then they can also potentially have a point of view.

Viveiros de Castro's reference to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* illustrates that the component parts of the whole, although seemingly unrelated, reflect a generated interrelatedness beings, bodies, things, experiences, even beliefs, which are structured from inherited notions of perception. *Habitus* has a broad potentiality of understandings that can be applied to statues in their temple/shrine environment and their learned behavior as such, i.e. statues are influenced by the materiality in their environment as well as the ensuing performances that take place there. They therefore come to expect certain behaviors from their devotees as well as to have their environment kept in a particular way, especially once they have been resident there for centuries, such as is the case with the Virgin of Alcala. In its theoretical agility, *habitus* can also be considered an active and creative response-like relationship between people and their ontologies/worlds, always in the process of being and becoming as actors (and devotees) are subject to a range of different experiences, circumstances and relationships which would presumably allow for ontological possibilities to emerge.

It must be noted here that perspectives are not relativistic. This is a departure from Rowlands' (2005: 73) relativistic materiality which indicates that objects should not be automatically afforded their own constitutions when divorced from the processes that created them. Building on Viveiros de Castro's idea that 'perspectives' are not relative to plants, animals, objects and other persons, relativism implies that there is an objective, core, central, culturally agreed upon ideology to which all things, actions, and persons must be relative. In the case studies, identities

of the Goddess and the Virgin are not fixed. These statues are subjects capable of participating in co-relational activities and exchanges. Although human persons often relate to statues as social relations (because human persons and statue persons share culture in terms of religion), the perspective of being 'social' belongs to human persons. Statue persons form a part of human person social networks, and they also belong to other ways of being that are unknown to us because they have different points of view located within their 'statue-bodies'. We can therefore only speculate as to the extent of their sociability in terms the relationships that human persons have with them (and the accounts given accordingly while conducting research). As the relational methodology used in this thesis indicates, statue persons are capable of being sociable while maintaining their own ontologies if that is what relationships with human persons require. This exemplifies how relationality is not relativism because religious statues such as the Goddess and the Virgin do not always share the idea of that which they should be relative to.

In my own experiences with the Virgin I have participated in more than one private encounter where I have placed my head under her mantle and asked for a miracle. Although I do not have the same perspective as a devotee, I was emotionally moved by the experiences. Here, a type of relational ontology emerged between us. I am asserting that the Virgin was brought into a form of *being* in the moment when I had an emotional response within the encounter. For that matter, it can be argued that we both entered into relational engagement where we were both transformed into subjects of one another. The Virgin went from being an 'object' of my study to a relational being, while I went from being a researcher to a momentary devotee. Further, the *Santero* claims that I was brought to that particular shrine by the power of that particular Virgin. He said that she 'called me' there. So if I am to take the idea of relational engagements and co-inspired responsiveness seriously, then the proposition that the Virgin called me to her shrine is

also a possibility. If the Virgin called me to her shrine, then it can be suggested that it was not only the theological, 'universal' Mary that did so, but this particular, local Virgin from her particular, bodily, 'powerful' perspective. The relationship I now have with the Virgin, either temporally while I sit here writing about my experiences with her (thus imagining her and her shrine), or while I am in her physical presence, point to the fact that ontological possibilities are as varied and unique as the persons entering into such engagements.

*'To fetish'*

In understanding this thesis' relational perspective, we can also employ Johnson's (2000) suggestion that we reinstate the fetish as a 'fluid, mediating term, an idea about objects, not an object itself – a mode of action, "to fetish"' (2000: 260) as a way to discuss forms of performance driven devotion. He says,

Fetish may be best viewed as a mode of action rather than a kind of object itself. It is a condensation of social powers onto an object in order to reconfigure them. "To fetish" would therefore be more apt than "fetish." Viewed in this broad sense, it is a structuring technique of human consciousness in time, not an evolutionary stage of the false attribution of power to objects, a stage now surpassed (2000: 249).

This thesis holds that the attribution of power to objects is one of many sophisticated and complex forms of relationally engaging the world and religion, the idea of using the fetish in verb-form, i.e. 'to fetish' implies motive action, i.e. repeatedly creatively inventing and reinventing ties with the divine. Here the outcome would be similar to that which is proposed of animism, i.e. 'to fetish' implies an active form of co-relationality between statues and devotees. For example, the Virgin is intimately linked to her territory, and (according to both the *Santero* and Father Marco) to remove her, even if it is for a short period of time, distresses devotees.

When the statue is taken out of her shrine, the relationships that people have with her are placed under a certain amount of strain which indicates that the *whole* of this vernacular religiosity is fundamentally based on the statue being present in her shrine where she can physically be seen and/or accessed. Unlike the cyclical nature of the Glastonbury Goddess religion, the nature of Catholicism is one that denotes a 'linear faith'. It is based on an absolute beginning and end. The care with which the Catholic statue undergoes maintenance and restoration is indicative of its value to devotees. As mentioned in the chapter of the Virgin, I was told that the *camaristas* are currently taking a restoration course together so that 'their Virgin' does not have to leave her shrine. The preservation and continuation of the physical statue of the Virgin is of the utmost importance in maintaining relationships and the figures relational status.

When statues of the Goddess begin to deteriorate, instead of undergoing a restoration process as the Virgin does, the willow figures are ceremonially burned to make way for new statues, as suits their religiosity's focus on continual transformation and seasonal renewal. The painting of the Goddess that holds the centre of the temple together is the only static object there, i.e. it is the only object that is not moved around, changed, dressed and re-dressed. The artist of the painting also mused over the fact that her painting will be there long after she herself is dead if it is preserved properly.

Further, time is an important factor in establishing relational status among devotees of both the Goddess and Virgin, i.e. the longer the statue has been around, the more significance it seems to have. Here, time and continuation through the preservation of rituals and customs have made this statue a relation among her community. Caroline (the woman who created the central painting of the Goddess Temple) told me that in time, this image will grow more powerful, i.e. the more people who worship and pay homage to this image of the Goddess, the more powerful

it/she becomes. These are prime examples of what it means 'to fetish' things. So religion, like relationality, in its flexibility is not only a mutual response between devotees and statues, but it is also a mode of action.

### *Performing Statues*

If how we treat statues is indicative of one of the ways in which their animacy and relational statuses are exemplified, then how they treat devotees is also an indication of their animacy and potential relational perspectives. How might this work? Although statues are physically passive in terms of motility, they are active in other ways. Pels (2003) has noted that

People perform objects . . . but these objects also perform people by constraining their movements and by suggesting particular encounters between them and others'. Similarly, in various ways, amulets, mascots and charms influenced the ways in which people behaved in certain situations, directly affecting how they experienced and navigated the world (2003: 13).

From what Pels argues, it can be suggested that religious experiences with performing 'objects' are co-created. The expectations that devotees have of them creates the reciprocal means through which statues perform and relate back. The Goddess and the Virgin are said to grant wishes and miracles, they empathize, they care, they protect against drought, they cure infertility, they heal, and they do numerous other things through influencing powers 'out there in the ether'. Devotees perform for them in order to receive blessings and gifts of a supernatural or mystical quality and these performances are based on relationships and faith. Accounts given by Goddess and Virgin devotees relay experiences of animation and movement. For example, statues of the Virgin Mary are notorious for producing tears. Warner says,

In medieval miracle stories, statues and paintings, in accordance with iconodule belief, are constantly coming to life. In many the Virgin weeps, as she did in 1953 in Syracuse and elsewhere more recently; in one, a Saracen is converted when her breasts become flesh and flow with oil (1978: 293)

Tear production is one of the ways in which statues perform for devotees. For example, Caroline (the creator of the painting in the Goddess Temple) says that when she stands under the painting and looks up, the eyes of the Goddess will become tearful with empathy for whatever it is that the artist is feeling or 'taking to her' in terms of problems. According to the *camaristas* the Virgin has emotions. Paqui told me that she has seen tears on the statue's face during the intimate, 'very feminine' process of bathing and changing the Virgin.

Other ways in which statues perform are through changes in facial expressions. The three *camaristas* I interviewed said that they have seen the statue's facial expression change. The *Santero* said that he has seen 'his Virgin' as he calls her, go from angry, to sad, to joyous. The Virgin punishes him and her face looks angry when he does something as simple as killing a mosquito. The Nine Morgens have plaster cast faces that have also been said to 'smile' or 'be pissy'. Here, too, facial expressions change when the statues are participating in relational encounters with devotee.

A final example of one of the ways in which statues perform comes from the account given by the *Santero* on our first encounter in the spring of 2007. He said at the event of her coronation in the early 1990's, statues of the Virgin from villages in the surrounding province of Cadiz were brought to the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala to witness her crowning. The *Santero* said she was recognized as being more 'queenly' than other statues of the Virgin. Here, statues performed for

other statues. As such it can be suggested that the Virgin of Alcala is thought capable of recognizing her own status, position and sovereignty over other statues. These performances are the results of co-inspired, mutual, personal, private encounters with the divine. These, too, are some of the ways in which relationality/Western animism/relationality works and how statues are relational, subjective participants in performances with devotees.

### *Display and relational aesthetic*

As a final point to this chapter, but not least in importance, relational aesthetics play an important, visible role in statue devotion. The ways in which statues are displayed and whether or not they are physically accessible is a significant factor in understanding how performance inspires and promotes relationality, perspectives, ontological emergence. Whether or not a statue can be touched and physically interacted with has an impact on the role that 'it' as materiality plays contextually. Aesthetics also promote inspiration for further creative modes of religious material expression that therefore promote survival and continuation of further practices. Further (and as will be discussed in great detail in the following Chapter 7) the aesthetics and economy of offerings that occur in relation to the Goddess and the Virgin are sometimes tangible, experiential, sensual, and rely on relational encounters. These component parts create the whole of shrine, temple and altar experiences.

A statue that is touched frequently, such as the Virgin of Alcala, might play a more animated, fetishistic role to her devotees than one who is not. Touch aids in fostering relationships. If statues 'embody' the Goddess or the Virgin, or if they are seen as the bodies of the Virgin and the Goddess, then it is no surprise that devotees feel the urge to touch them. Turner says, 'By personifying the sacred bodily image a woman transforms it – transubstantiates it – into a living



presence' (1999: 115). As an example, Turner writes about a female devotee of Mary who features a statue of the Virgin on her private altar:

"Most of us look at a statue or a picture and we know it's just that , but we don't want it to be just that. It's our link. Even though it's made out of stone, it's not just stone – it's spirit... With Mary, I hope that she will someday envelop me physically, and take me in her robes" (Turner, 1999: 115).

The importance of being able to touch a statue of devotion influences the strength of interactions with that statue. The Virgin of Alcala is deliberately accessible and displayed in such a way as to fill the senses and promote passionate, tangible involvement. She can be touched, smelled and felt. Her mantle is a point of interaction, and prayer requests in the form of little notes can be seen under her feet. This inspires closeness and intimacy. More so, when one is underneath the back of the heavy protective mantle, the cloth hangs down over one's body to the extent that everything goes dark. This is the closest and most intimate that devotees can physically get with the statue and figures of both case studies.

In contrast, the Goddess figures appear to be designed to play more of an aesthetic role. One can sit directly at their feet or at the altar on sheepskin rugs and light candles, pray, meditate, or leave written petitions and prayers in a basket on the altar. The willow with which they are made is rough. The wicker figures are not solid, but appear to be 'flimsy', tall and slim. The fabrics that hang from the figures of the Goddess are positioned in deliberate ways which are immovable, and therefore, in contrast to the Virgin, reflect inaccessibility. The Goddess statues sit against the temple wall as would a vase or a decoration, facing outward. Further, there are few actions or thing that one can 'do' with her. Sometimes things (such as jewelry or photos) are seen

pinned on the body of the Goddess, but there is no set protocol where the figures of the Goddess can be interacted with such as in the case of 'the mantle' of the Virgin. When I first met the *camaristas*, for example, one of the first questions they asked me was (and I paraphrase) 'Have you been to the shrine? Did you go beneath the mantle?' 'Going beneath the mantle' can be considered, apart from tugging on the penis of the fertility Jesus, the main thing 'to do' in the shrine of the Virgin. An equivalence of this might be sitting or lying in the centre of the protective circle of the Morgens when in the Goddess Temple, yet still there is very little contact with the figures themselves. It must be noted that, however, if the Santero does not want someone to enter the chamber of the Virgin, or if he is mistrustful of a person, he will not allow that person entry. This is, he told me, because of the amount of gold that the Virgin wears.

Another example of positioning and display can be found in a Catholic statue of Mary, Our Lady of Glastonbury. This English statue receives very little by way of passionate displays of physical touch and affection. She is displayed in such a way as to not be accessible to devotees that go into the shrine to see her. She stands on a tall, lean pedestal (at least seven feet high) at the back wall of the shrine, and further, behind red velvet ropes strategically placed to keep people out. I personally found the display of this statue to be impersonal. Indicative of never physically realized courtly love, it can be suggested that her devotees remain caught in a tension imposed by reform and modernity, where their failing needs for physicality with the object of their devotion are barely, if ever, realized. This creates an interesting contrast. If the focus of this thesis is about materiality and relationships, then what we have here is a case of relating to from afar. Hence, the findings of this case study complex reflect the importance (or non importance) of touch in religious material encounters.

As argued in Chapter 4, the reason for the acceptability of these close encounters rests on the fact that southern Spanish Catholicism has suffered few, minor disruptions throughout its more recent religious history. What disruptions it has encountered were not the same as the direct assaults on Catholicism, and thus on religious materiality which resulted from the Protestant Reformation. In terms of the Goddess religiosity, the Protestant Reformation, coupled with the particular effects that the Enlightenment had on modernity in England, has affected how materiality is used, engaged and reproduced in various British religiosities. For example, and as previously mentioned, the Glastonbury Goddess figures are designed mainly for aesthetic purposes, not necessarily to be touched. While touch of the actual figures is not forbidden, it is not encouraged. This can be attributed to the wider effects of both modernity and the Protestant Reformation, both movements of which, due to the focus on transcendence, discourage physical, active relating with materiality for fear of it being seen to point toward common ignorance, a pagan past, or primitive alterity. Hence, aesthetics, arrangement and display play an important role in relational encounters with statues.

Altar, temple and shrine aesthetics inform display and display informs modes of devotion. Turner says 'Women's altars promote an *aesthetic of relationship*' (1999: 95) where power is activated. The important role that the aesthetics that these 'other objects' play is apparent in how the 'stage is set' for performers, or would be actors in relational encounters with objects, to perform acts of devotion at altars and with statues. For example, the aesthetics found in the Glastonbury Goddess Temple and the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala, especially in terms of color, follow patterns in accordance with the liturgical and ritual years. In this sense of changing aesthetics, and in terms of the temple dressings and the changing of the Virgin's mantles, there are similarities. There are, however, also notable differences. In the Catholic case study, the

statue is the focus of liturgical and aesthetic change. The colors of her mantles reflect the time of year, and her ritual bathing and dressing are the main events that take place around her. The shrine aesthetic with the *ex votos* and other permanent fixtures remain unchanged. In contrast, the whole of the materiality in the Goddess Temple is subject to change with the ritual year. Not only are the Goddess figures dressed and changed, but the whole of the temple aesthetic is overhauled in a flurry of mass creativity and materiality. The use of colors, the offerings, the smells of flowers, the candles, and incense, all have the ability to tie the whole of religious experience together for the performers to come 'on stage', the stage set for devotion, and perform.

Material use and display (on altars or placed on statues) are capable of creating messages that contain cues for different types of religious experience and/or inspiration. According to Hall display and arrangement work 'like a language' (2003: 8). Apart from the ontological perspectives afforded objects whereby they are capable of supporting their own discourse, objects left on altars and statues can also be understood as experiential fusing agents. Similar to putting a plug in a socket which activates and transmits the before mentioned experiential cues, it can be suggested that the act of offering links not only the agent-devotee into their own individual experience, but other shrine and temple visitors who view the 'setting' and are potentially inspired by the votive offerings left by others. In these cases, aesthetics are not limited to superficial visibility. Offerings are also indicative of the types of relationships had between devotees and statues. In support of this, Kay Turner tells us that

Its [the altar's] aesthetic of relationship urges acceptance of a religiously grounded paradox: this site of material accumulation serves the circulation of spiritual riches (Turner, 1999:109).

Certainly because of the accessible and tactile nature of the altar experience in the both the shrine of the Virgin and Goddess Temple relationships are promoted and strengthened, and the objects passed from devotees (agents of offerings) are capable of becoming the 'shapers' of religious experience. As with the stones discussed by Harvey (2005b), some objects found in the shrine and the temple are more relational than others, yet most have relational possibilities. For example (and as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7), the relational status of offerings given to statues of the Goddess and Virgin and of those left at altars and in the temple and shrine have mediating qualities, some of which are capable of containing their own discourses, power, and/or the essences of their givers, others of which are *mere objects*. Further, there are several other objects that are resident within the temple and shrine, some of whom are persons and others of which are not. Identities and statuses of other temple objects shift in accordance with placement and use. Many of the objects in the Goddess Temple, for example, are moved around, and therefore their position, status and potentiality of personhood constantly change with the creative ebb and flow of the temple. Pieces of colored cloth will be used one season as a particular thing, while the next season it may be used to dress an aspect of the temple related to something entirely different. Many of the materials used in the temple, such as statues, stones and candles are used in temple dressings time and time again, but they are never used in the same way. Also in the Goddess Temple, many of the objects are stored in the attic where they are used and reused seasonally. They even intermingle seasonally. Yet how these objects, such as long pieces of shiny material, statues, bones, shells, candles, and stones, reincarnate, so to speak, indicates their relational status and personhood potentiality. Further, they have the opportunity to have relationships with the different objects next to whom/which they are displayed.

Combinations of objects on display also help shape the altar, shrine and temple experience. Turner says in relation to domestic altars, 'If the first aesthetic goal of an altar is to represent relationship, then the primary artistic move is to set potent images in relation to each other' (1999: 96). Altar objects might 'represent relationship', but they can also *be* in relationship with their arrangers. Once placed and arranged on altars, or at the feet of statues, identities of objects change according to who or what other object is nearby.

The altar displays discussed by Turner are, however, in context. They are in their domestic settings. They will not encounter the same issues as they might find if they were to be displayed in museums. Shrine and temple objects change because they become publically visible. In comparison with how museum objects are displayed, Yiao-hwei says,

Objects can mean different things when they are displayed or grouped with a different with a different collection of companions (Hooper-Greenhill, 1991: 100). That is to say, as the contextual placement of an object changes, so the significance of that object is transformed (2000: 116).

When objects are moved around in the Goddess Temple, their roles change depending on whom or what object 'companion' is next to them. A male Goddess devotee whom I encountered in the temple one day told me, 'some objects are more representational than others'. Never quite getting to the bottom of what this meant, I took it to mean that some objects carry heavier weight of some kind while others are less important. There are varying degrees of being, and being representational. Once placed and arranged on altars, or at the feet of statues, identities, purpose, and value of objects change. They go from being 'everyday things', commodities, or something

of sentimental value to being things that are devotionally valuable which is highly relational, yet they can also maintain their previous forms simultaneously.

Although there are no 'rules' in place about how offerings can or should be valued in terms of economic viability in either of the case studies discussed here, there *are* protocol and rubric involved in terms of the acceptability or unacceptability of offerings. The materiality found in the Goddess Temple is bright, colourful, often sparkling or shiny in some way. According to Turner,

A pleasing visual environment helps make the altar a desirable place, both for its creator and for her deities. Decorative materials enhance the altar's possibilities for communication. Their texture, glitter, and bright colors – their visual vitality – provide an inducement for focusing on the power made available at the altar (1999: 104).

Although individually inspired creativity is valued in each case study, especially with regards to the Goddess religion, there are common rubrics that are adhered to in both Catholicism and Goddess Paganism. These rubrics create and perpetuate the aesthetic of the temple and the shrine. This acceptability or non-acceptability of offerings is rooted in the agreed upon vernacular shrine/temple aesthetics of the religiosities. They are also a combination of doctrine, popular devotion and what devotees think that their deity/saint will enjoy or find acceptable. This is because in both case studies, 'she' has certain expectations. As we have seen in the Goddess religion case study, a decorated mannequin head was left on the altar in the temple. This offering was quickly removed from the altar and thrown away (I was told with a certain amount of disgust on the part of the informant) so as not to ruin the carefully preserved temple aesthetic. In essence, 'just any old thing' will not do, although this alien offering might have carried with it a

wealth of devotional value and intentionality. This kind of decorative protocol affects how and what shrine and temple offerings are acceptable and therefore displayed. Therefore those who make offerings are not given total freedom of expression, which imposes limitations on the devotional imaginative process. So whereas the Protestant reformation and Enlightenment thinking might have had an effect on material engagement with statues (a fact which could simply be attributed to the ways in which the wicker figures are not particularly easy to touch), the effort and creativity that goes into decorating the Goddess Temple plays a significant factor in relational engagement with materiality more broadly.

### *Conclusion to Chapter 6*

Bringing questions of agency into light, this chapter has proposed that relationships with statues serve as a testing ground for understanding the roles of matter in Western cultural discourses generally. It has found that the exaggerated roles of the religious objects discussed *in context* demonstrate their potential relationality. Here, statue persons are found to be active, relational subjects of devotion whose personhood emerges during moments of active relating. This is evidenced in how the Virgin and the Goddess are created, treated, addressed, displayed and given gifts (the latter being discussed in detail in Chapter 7). Following relational theoretical discourses, this chapter has surveyed the relational roles of the statues of the Glastonbury Goddess and the Virgin of Alcala. It has provided the reader with a relational framework from which to understand how ontological possibilities emerge when persons (human persons and statue persons) enter into relationships with one another. Complementary to this chapter, the next chapter surveys the use, value and roles of offerings given in the Goddess Temple and the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala. Second to statues, offerings are a significant part of relational devotion that exemplify the ever changing ways in which religion is performed.



## *Chapter 7*

### *Gifts, Value and the Fetish: Testing the Roles of Offerings*

This chapter focuses on the relational roles of gifts (coded as offerings) given to the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess and continues the discussion from the last chapter with regards to materiality and its relational/ontological possibilities. Offerings, materiality, aesthetic and display presents us with tangible, visible clues that aid in understanding how gift giving facilitates relationships with statues and consequent ontologies in contemporary religious contexts in England and Spain. Further, this investigation has required a more detailed re-interrogation of the fetish as material and conceptual means through which to test both the concepts relationality and the roles of value and materiality (of both offerings and statues) in Western discourses. Through a discussion of value, offerings and fetishism, this argument builds on the last chapter's discussion of Western animist relationality, personhood, perspectives, and aesthetics. It is, finally, through the phenomena of giving gifts/objects to artefacts/objects that fetishism and animism merge, and how we know we are dealing with relationality.

#### *The Roles of Value*

Although the concept of value can be understood in several different ways in Western culture, within our dominant modern discourses, value is often intimately related to capitalism, economics and commodities. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, however, both value and the offerings used in exchange situations with the statues of the Virgin and the Goddess are relational, an assertion that is best addressed through a discussion of Mauss's (2006) 'gift'.

In Western economic discourses, value is generally found to be inherent in some objects while it is represented in others. It can be sentimental, devotional, economic, political, magical and/or spiritual and it does not easily conform or cohere to the dominant constructs and dualisms set out by either capitalism or modernity. Based on findings from studying literature about Polynesia, Melanesia, and the American Northwest, Mauss (2006: 5) made the distinction between two types of social relations: gift relations and commodity relations. Commodity relations, as would be found in the 'Euro-centric' West, illustrate the 'strict distinction' between 'things and persons' during exchange situations (Mauss, 2006: 61). The acceptance of a gift by one person gives the giver power over that person (Mauss, 2006: 11). Gift relations, in pre-capitalist societies, illustrate how those involved in gift exchange are linked, i.e. magically, socially, morally, and culturally. The crux of Mauss's contrast between societies lay in the idea that class societies have forgotten the transformative and ambiguous value of the gift. It is not, however, that relational value does not exist in Western European culture, it is simply not *as* acknowledged. This is because our dominant capitalistic discourse generally encourages people to believe that money can buy freedom and anonymity from social ties. He writes, 'It is our western societies who have recently made man an 'economic animal'. But we are not yet all creatures of this genus (2006: 98). Strathern says that although our Euro-American cultural capitalistic construct appears to be 'free-standing', in actuality, it is not (1997: 307). People cannot be separated from the material world within which they live, conduct business, trade, give gifts, and interact. Strathern says: 'No one is really an isolate' (1997: 195). The value of objects is just as contextual and relational in the West as it is in other cultures. It is based not only on broad cultural valuations, but on unique relationships specific to time and location.

In both the literature review and the last chapter the fetish was introduced, defined and discussed in terms of its etymology and relational possibilities. How the fetish relates to modern concepts of value and then the relational materiality of offerings will now be discussed. The dominant discursive ways in which religious offerings and other objects are valued in our modern culture of capital can begin to be better understood through examples of how European traders encountered the materiality of, first, the African fetish, i.e. for something to be valuable it must be economically viable in terms of European value systems. These ‘budding materialists’ as Graeber calls them (2005: 431) were the forefathers of the modern culture of capital’s current identity. The nature of European value perception is, however, far more complex than this one sided and somewhat simplified statement. Since early colonial encounters differing cultural concepts of value have confounded scholars, traders, explorers and missionaries. What one cultural valuation found attractive and worthwhile, another would find vulgar, disgusting and worthless. This clash of cultures brought the very essence of what cultures find valuable into question, and these questions are directly related to religion and belief. Graeber writes,

Confronted with abundant evidence of the arbitrariness of value, they [Europeans] instead fell back on the position that Africans themselves were arbitrary: they were fetishists, willing to ascribe divine status to a completely random collection of material objects (2005: 424-425).

So when European traders encountered African fetishes, ‘free-standing’ detachable economics (which was a form of exchange little known to Africans until later on) encountered a world where gifts and other objects and interactions were loaded with social significations. Yet Western tendencies to categorize and label objects through the lens of non-relational economics stopped European traders from seeing the complex social value of the fetish. Regardless of the

detached buy and sell interactions that Europeans thought they were taking part in (for their part), they, too, were entering into social relations with Africans whether they thought these relations were purely free standing economics or not. Graeber compares Marx's fetish with that which came about from European/African encounters to explain this social zone of relating. He writes,

In the European accounts social relations tend to disappear. They were simply of no interest. For them there was therefore virtually nothing in between God and the world of material objects. But the Europeans could at least compliment themselves that, unlike Africans, they managed to keep the two apart. Of course they were wrong; the whole thing was largely a projection; they were in fact already well on the way to the kind of fetishism described by Marx where social relations, for the very reason that they are made to disappear, end up getting projected onto objects. All this was in dramatic contradistinction with the Africans, for whom social relations were everything (Graeber, 2005: 432).

Relationships with persons, space, objects and place were, however, always taking place, whether European traders, Enlightened thinkers, and/or colonists had a context within which to understand those ideas or not, and relationships with statues were taking place in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century European cultural discourses as they are today. This is relevant because many of our culturally constructed ideas about how value works are reflected in the accounts and dealings of European traders and colonial encounters.

Contemporarily, and despite modernist Western scholarly distinctions found when, for example, relics are kissed or touched, or when statues are knelt before, the ways in which value

works in vernacular religion at grassroots level differs to how it has been generally understood in the academy. Stallybrass says,

We are squeamish about that process everywhere outside the area we have defined as “the economic.” Our squeamishness is indeed inscribed in our attempts to separate economics from cultural valuation, persons from things, subjects from objects, the “priceless” (us) from the “valueless” (all the rest of the we might imagine as the detachable world) (Stallybrass et al., 2000: 3).

Some scholars might, for example, find offerings such as cow skulls, locks of framed hair, and ‘sentimental objects’ grotesque, or remnants of a pagan past or “primitive” alterity. Or they might find the valuing and venerating of relics, or pieces of cedar and woven willow branches, to be irrational. It can be suggested here that Stallybrass is referring to the fact that scholars might feel uncomfortable when people, or devotees, enter into relationships with materiality because relationships are often the stuff of unpredictability. In the relational zone, offerings, gifts and even commodities are as individualized and personal as the fingerprints of the persons involved in their creation and/or exchange. Each relational event is private and unique whether or not it follows the ‘rules’ or ‘protocol’ set out by the religions within which it takes place. As mentioned in the introduction this unpredictability can be associated with the ways in which the feminine has been typically stereotyped, i.e. uncontrollable, wild, emotional, and irrational. Further, relationships, relating and communication are classically understood as the realm of female action and interaction. They challenge relationships/relationality in ways that further highlight the problem of materiality and the Protestant fear of matter (*mater*, mother). Relationships are a continual occurrence and the ways in which objects are valued is also in a

constant state of flux and change. This challenges the ways in which Western scholars typically reproduce concepts of relationship-free 'detachable' commoditized value.

Building on this last assertion, a certain amount of unpredictable value can be found in many of the materials used in the creation of religious objects (statues and offerings) which have no intrinsic, or what Appadurai prefers to call 'prime value' (due to there being no such thing as universally 'intrinsic value') (1986: 159). How, for example, offerings are valued can reflect the nature of how devotees value their relationships with statues. The objects that contain or represent this form of personalized value are capable of having personhood. We must therefore look at the biographies of *individual* objects and their relationship to time, space, location, and agent to better understand the kind of devotional value studied here. Renfrew (1986) says,

The specific history of an individual object, which is of no particular interest because of its raw material or its workmanship, can also afford it a generally agreed value – for instance, a memento of Queen Elizabeth or of George Washington, or the Stone of Scone. The same is relevant to the reverence accorded objects of religious veneration, whether they are supposed relics of an actual person, or images that command respect, even when the constituent material is not prized – fetish in the original sense. This may derive in part from the specific history of the object, and part from an implied use-value, since the image may be believed to have active powers (1986:158-159).

Renfrew is correct in his assertion that individual objects have to be looked at accordingly, i.e. on an individual basis, even if the actual materials used have no culturally intrinsic value. The value of objects must be regarded in terms of how they are individually treated and related to/with instead of only in terms of widely accepted cultural valuations. I disagree with Renfrew

about the creation or craftsmanship of an object being of little importance. As Marx would have agreed, labor is an important factor in the creation of religious objects, a subject explored in the previous chapter in relation to statues. Marx (1967 [1867]: chp. 2) was aware of the oversimplification and problems that accompany the idea of the 'free-standing' economy of the West. This understanding led to his creation of the idea of the 'fetishism of commodities'. Marx asserts that humans cannot be alienated from the things that they create, buy, exchange, or have in their possession and/or environment. However, the way in which religious objects are valued differs greatly to how 'everyday' things are valued, even though both object types (if there can be types) can aid in creating and informing our immediate worlds. This extends to the creation and aesthetic of offerings and the individual relational zones within which they inhabit.

The relational nature of value can be best reflected in religious objects and offerings. Within the shrine and temple of the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess, gift giving and exchange can be seen in different ways that surpass our modern cultural capitalistic norms. It is within these contexts that objects openly and acceptably have values that signify or contain something other than commoditized value. How, then, is value ascribed to offerings? Is the value of offerings found in the intentionality with which they are given? Do they bear the essences of their givers? The answer to these questions is that offerings are highly personal, which makes them capable of containing many different types of value. For example, an offering can function as a type of currency, but its value is not commoditized and detached from the giver. The act of making gifts to statues creates relationships that generally do not bear the mark of a cold, detachable capitalism. Instead, through personal relationships with the divine in statue form, something mystical, mediating, supernatural and intercessory is generally sought in terms of worldly manifestations. In these situations, exchanges with the divine in statue form resemble

more of that which has been described in the general gift exchange of the indigenous contexts described by Mauss (1997) and Strathern (1997) where relations are constantly being created, maintained and negotiated. Gifts are passed through non dualistic, transformational, relational zones and a myriad of ontological possibilities emerge.

### *The roles of offerings*

Having initiated a general discussion about value, this chapter now turns its attention to offerings, their composition, and the different ways in which they are valued specifically.

Research has found that offerings given to the Virgin and the Goddess illustrate the concept of relationality for two reasons: first, because statue persons emerge with each relational encounter, i.e. it is through the act of giving objects to objects that we know we are dealing with relational engagement. Second, as will be elaborated upon in great detail in this chapter, because the role of objects given in shrines and temples, such as rings, bracelets, even money, are transformative.

Sometimes offerings are relational tools with which one can negotiate with the divine.

Sometimes offerings serve as the basis of contracts ('If you do this for me, then I will give you a lock of my hair'), and sometimes offerings are made in moments of devotional praise and celebration. Whatever the performance or the reason for the performance may be, a type of gift economy is set in motion when devotees make offerings to statues. Kay Turner (1999) refers to 'the economy of the altar' as the 'model of the exchange critical to the productivity of any relationship, human or divine' (1999:107). Turner is right. At the altar, personal problems are laid bare, and promises, sacrifices, pledges and deals are made in ways that reflect the personal relationships experienced between devotee and divine.

The petitions, promises, and requests made to the Goddess and the Virgin share many similarities, as do the nature of the venerative process involved. Yet interviews have found that



in both contexts, devotees seek out and employ the divine for help with issues such as healing of self and/or family, infertility, and/or economic hardship. Offerings also signal thanks for favors done. There are, however, three general reasons why offerings are made:

1. Something good has happened in the devotee's life where the person feels that it has been "Her" (the Goddess or the Virgin) who has provided it for them and they want to show their gratitude in the form of an offering, so offerings are made in thanks.
2. A gift or offering is given with or before a promise or pledge, i.e. 'If you do this for me, I will build a temple in your name, bring you a lock of my hair, a gold ring, or build you new patio, give you a cow, or its skull when it is dead, etc.'
3. An offering is made as votive act of love or veneration without asking for anything in return, i.e. no direct motivation, but the reinforcement of commitment, relationship and devotion.

Further, the types of negotiations entered into with the Goddess and the Virgin point toward the relational roles of offerings. What offerings transmit and mediate for devotees is personal and contextual and it does not always reflect their material composition or value as it is understood within the boundaries of Western capitalistic norms. This is where understanding what is valuable to each religiosity, the cultures within which they exist, and the individual biography of objects is a worthwhile pursuit.

Gift giving to the divine promotes, ensures and facilitates relationships. The value of the gift can also reflect the nature of the relationship as well as the cultural valuations from within which the gift is being given, i.e. devotees want the Virgin to have what normative economic value system by which they live considers to be the best. Schrift says,

Where commodity exchange is focused on a transfer in which objects of equivalent exchange value are reciprocally transacted, the actual objects transferred are incidental to the value of the relationship established (1997: 3).

According to this, the act of making an offering of economic value to the Virgin, for example, would reflect the nature and worth of the relationship had with her, thereby increasing the possibility of earning deeper relationships and acts of reciprocated value or more. Likewise, offering the best of what one has in terms of personal or sentimental value, i.e. that which is most important to a devotee is also a gift of great worth; one that is almost, but not entirely, freed from commoditization. Schrift's analysis is based on the idea that gifts are being exchanged between two human persons; however, the point is clear. In the gesture of gift giving, gifts are given that are considered of great worth and this is a gesture which reflects the worth of the relationship to one or both parties involved in the exchange.

Significant to this discussion of worth, the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess receive donations and monetary offerings. My first instinct with this research was to ignore the fact that money is left in shrines. For me, money is not very interesting in terms of materiality, i.e. it appears to be lacking in color and creativity. However, as I discovered, it makes up a very large part of the offerings given in both case studies and is a key illustration to my argument. Like the relational roles of other offerings, the value of money and its trajectory change substantially in moments of devotion and giving. Hence, money is a culturally fetishized 'thing', and its presence in temples and shrines and on offering plates makes it just as mediatory as other offerings, but it differs from other offerings in that it has direct attachments to the state, i.e. money connects its agents to the culture of capital. Thus Western animist and fetishist relationality include the use of money and this use of money is a direct reflection of how

modernity (or Westerners attempts at being modern) operates side by side with religion and performance. Lastly, money cannot be ignored because without it, the religiosities examined in this thesis would not be in existence, i.e. both rely on donations for survival and continuation.

*Wood, silver, bone and stone*

The materials used in the composition of offerings given to the Goddess and the Virgin vary from precious metals such as gold and silver to sentimental things and easily found natural objects such as wood, a pouch of earth, bones, or a hazelnut. As will be addressed further on, these materials and their uses have similarities to those of the fetish. Devotees of the Goddess, for example, will find materials occurring in nature, such as wood, bone, stone, or acorns, to be suitable gifts worth using to create objects, or simply given unrefined, to the Goddess. They will also find things they have created with the Goddess in mind to be of great worth. Animal skulls and other types of bones are commonly seen on the altar and in Temple, or an acorn picked up en route to the Goddess temple by a devotee, for example, will have value because it is indigenous to the land around Glastonbury, and this land is said to have been re-territorialized by the Goddess and her devotees.

As discussed in the previous chapter, how the statues are treated is an indication of their relational status, and in the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala and the temple of the Glastonbury Goddess, statues are treated as divinity. This is exemplified in the use of precious metals as offerings. The statues are given gifts of jewelry and other things that demonstrate their relational, even royal, status. Spanish and English temple and shrine gold is multi-faceted. It is economically valuable, and valuable in many other ways, too. As seen from the ethnographies, gold plays an extraordinary role when examining the gifts/offerings given to the Spanish Virgin.

For example, the Santero said that they have a backlog of jewelry to be placed on the body of the Virgin, and he changes each ring on her fingers out for other ones at least once a week. Father Marco also told me that a large amount of gold passes through the shrine yearly. He used the example of there being enough gold to melt down and immerse the statue of the Virgin completely. Gold is the most common theme for religiously and economically precious offerings throughout Spain.

Both the Virgin of Alcala and the briefly touched upon examination of Our Lady of Glastonbury are 'acknowledged statues' that have been crowned by the Vatican with crowns of gold that had been melted down from the jewelry of devotees. These crowns exemplify their status as royal, special, honored guests. The gold used contains economic and sentimental value simultaneously as it was the material of family heirlooms. This fact transforms the gold's value as it bears/bore essences of family members, thus further perpetuating relationships between family lineages of devotees with the statues, and rooting the statues further into their communities. This is another way in which the highest of economic and spiritual value is on display. In the crowns there are elements of sacrificial value, curative value, and things given in need or gratitude. The value of the gold threaded mantles of the Virgin is also an indication of the value she has for her devotees. In the Goddess Temple, too, there are objects of economic value. Much more silver than gold is left in the temple. This is perhaps due to the fact that silver is worn more by people in the 'alternative' scene than gold and represents a set of values found in the counter culture where this religiosity exists.

Creativity is relational, and creatively constructed objects made by devotees of both case studies are often of great worth, regardless of the materials used. For example, devotees of the Virgin will make promises to her, cut and frame locks of hair or bandages, make needlework

images and other objects relating to either the promise made, or to the miracle prayed for/granted, and the divinely inspired process of creation is the height of celebration of the Goddess. Turner says

Obviously, the altar's economy of spiritual "riches" does not refer to market value, but to great symbolic value, freely accruing in an environment of full and dynamic creative independence (Turner, 1999:109).

This 'creative independence' is, however, double sided and as mentioned previously, money, gold, and other items with 'market value' and they cannot always be isolated from the creative, symbolic 'spiritual riches' discussed by Turner. Offerings are often creative, spontaneous reactions of moments of devotion, faith, and need, and that can entail any number of readily available environmental elements, economically valuable or not.

### *Sentimental Value*

Another of the common themes that run through the types of offerings left in the temple and the shrines is that offerings given to the Virgin and the Goddess have sentimental value. Renfrew says,

Often the term "sentimental value" is used to refer to the estimation that a specific person accords an object when the high estimation is not widely shared (1986: 158).

In the cases discussed here, the value of objects is personal and not widely shared. Hence, sentimental value deals with two things: objects that contain the essences and identities of their owners, and objects that have 'unknowable' value to any person or object person outside the parameters of the individual, private, and votive act. That is, unless the objects also carry some

type of commoditized exchange value. Objects/offerings of sentimental value exemplify the fact that offerings are relational in their own way which differs from the relationality of statues. Let us now look at the role that objects of sentimental value play specifically.

Sentimental objects bear personhood in a way that is unique to objects. They are loaded with memory, essences, identity, and history, whether of places, experiences or social relations. Sentimental objects also have stories 'attached' to them. In essence, individual things, as Kopytoff (1986) says, have biographies. *Ex voto* pictures, for example, tell the stories and personal narratives of everyday people's gratitude following their return to good health. The Virgin of Alcala receives extremely personal items such as locks of plaited hair, jewellery or bandages worn by devotees, heir looms, or photos of loved ones ill or deceased. Baby items are also commonly left in the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala, as was pointed out previously one of her most famous roles is that of curer of infertility, much of which was once worn by the babies that were born to the mothers who visited the shrine seeking help with conception and fertility. This is why one often sees baby shoes, baby dummies, baby pictures and photos of babies in the shrine. As mentioned before, the jewellery left as offerings in the shrine were melted down to make the crown that sits on her head, much of which contained sentimental familial value. The Goddess is also famous for healing, and photos, jewellery, and other highly personal items of sentimental value are also found. The point of cohesion within the Goddess and Virgin case studies is that value is negotiable, indeed, relational in moments of giving and/or active relating. What is special about sentimental objects is that they have the ability to facilitate personal relationships with statues.

The understanding of religious offerings (especially *sentimental* objects) as extensions of the self is worth discussing insofar as it aids in understanding their flexibility and value as agents

of devotion. It also points toward a discussion that will be engaged further where the discourse of the fetish helps in better understanding the relational roles of offerings. Strathern (1997) says (to something that is also a valid statement for Westerners in general)

As I understand it, what Euro-Americans call gifts in the late twentieth-century consumer culture, whether body substance or merchandise, are regarded as extensions of the self insofar as they carry the expression of sentiments (1997: 302).

While gifts, or offerings to the divine, might 'carry the expression of sentiments', they are also capable of maintaining their own biographies, as suggested by Renfrew (1986: 159). For example, if an object is considered an extension of a devotee (something that is worn or carried for many years such as a piece of rose quartz or grandmother's ring), that object will contain the utmost value to him or her for many possible reasons. Those reasons might include the context in which the object came to the bearer, or perhaps there is an attachment that has grown with time spent with the object. That particular object may or may not be of *sentimental* value, but might also be capable of carrying, for example, the *essence* of the bearer, as with a picture, for example. This is especially true in terms of the value of *healing*. When the Virgin of Alcala or the Glastonbury Goddess are approached and negotiated with so that either the person doing the approaching or a loved one can be healed, the question arises: what price or object can be or should be paid or given in return for healing? In some instances, the act of curing a body of some form of illness is not something that can be bought. Hence, that which mediates between this world and the supernatural (offerings and statues) is sought for such feats and a devotee might want to give the most precious thing that he or she has in exchange for granting this favor. These 'things' that are given are often family heirlooms or things of sentimental, personal value and would have their own particular biography that would add to their 'specialness' in terms of

making an offering. If, for example, the individual path of one of the gold rings given at the shrine of Alcala is followed, one might see that it went from the extraction of gold from the earth, to production, then to an 'everyday' thing that was bought and sold (like those discussed by Miller, Latour, Appadurai and others) and given half heartedly to someone who in truth, did not like it. Then, let us assume that the ring went to a pawn broker where it sat for a year and collected dust before someone came along and bought it for a betrothal. After the betrothal, the betrothed wore it for 45 years until she died, leaving the ring to her daughter. Then the ring, out of desperation for the resolution of difficult circumstances makes it by the hand of the daughter to the shrine of the Virgin. Here, the ring is offered in absolute belief, prayer, confidence and meditation that said request will be answered, but allowing for the possibility that the Virgin or the Goddess knows best which might result in the request not being granted. The ring is then placed on the wooden fingers of the statue where it stays for a week before being sent to the *hermandad's* treasure store where it might stay for many years, or until it is melted down to make something special for the Virgin, such as an additional ornament to the crown (or as the parish priest said, before the Virgin gets immersed and plated in gold). This ring whose material came from the earth, then was mixed with other metal hardeners, was at one time something mundane (*mundial*, or from the earth), and it was *alive*. Then, apart from its humanly imposed value as precious gold, it became something of sentimental value. From here, it became a gift given to the divine in exchange for some type of aid in the form of supernatural intervention. It became something of sacred/relational value, i.e. something worthy of negotiations with the divine. In its biography, it was living and of the earth, then a commodity. Then it became something that was not a common commodity (at least to the person who wore it). It (and its value) was transformed in moments of manipulation and performance and in accordance with the



relationships and use value that persons and object persons were having with it at any given time. The sample ring mediates between statue and devotee, and relationships are consequently created and maintained. Hence, it follows, that if the same object (the rose quartz crystal or grandmother's ring) is given in devotion, it contains a multitude of possibilities, i.e. it can be a devotional agent whereby sentimental value (part of the identity of the giver) is transferred to the divine, it can be understood to contain the essence of the bearer, or it can have its own independent purpose for being.

*Value, miracles and veneration*

As demonstrated in the shrines of the Virgin and the Goddess, value must then take on a whole new set of rules: a baby dummy is just a baby dummy to the common observer, but a baby dummy offered in response to the 'miracle' of fertility is something more. It is transformed into a 'thank you', a physical part of the devotee extended in thanks, or a votive offering of praise to the Virgin who cured a woman's infertility. The presence of a baby dummy in the shrine testifies to miracle performed and gives hope and faith to other women or couples who make pilgrimages to the shrine to ask for the blessing of fertility. In a sense, the presence of the baby dummy is also an extension of the Virgin and her reciprocated relationship with the devotee. It links both Virgin and devotee to the answered prayer, miracle or blessing. To a Goddess devotee, a chestnut is not 'just a chestnut', but a thought of remembrance to the Goddess that may have wanted to be picked up by the devotee and taken to the altar. The chestnut is also a subject capable of transmitting praise or celebration to the Goddess who is responsible for not only creating it and the devotee, but for the world, life and its cycles. Therefore ontologically, different worlds are revealed in the things that are considered valuable and given in thanks or exchange inside the workings of the creative relational tensions that hold the economy of offerings together. The

'things' that are left behind by devotees go beyond meaning, representation, symbolic, social, and economic both in theory and in practice. They exist on the outskirts of capitalism and they have a pass to enter into the mainstream when and how they please. Offerings, like statues, operate within the relational, fetish zone.

### *Offerings and the fetish*

Now that value and offerings have been addressed in the case studies, a final discussion about the fetish and how it relates to the offerings given in the shrine and temple of the Virgin and the Goddess will be initiated. First, in order to embark on this examination effectively, it must be first reasserted that Goddess Pagans and vernacular Catholics are not 'fetishists' in the traditional sense of the word, nor is it the intention of this thesis to make this implication. Understanding the epistemological and cosmological differences between fetishists and vernacular Catholic and Goddess Pagan statue devotees are significant factors in understanding the roles of matter in each context. These things acknowledged and clarified, if the actual materiality, function and roles of offerings, compared with the materiality, function and roles of the fetish are considered, there are definite similarities as well as differences.

From the 'arbitrariness of value' (Graeber, 2005: 424-425) to the materials used, surveying the similarities found between offerings and fetishes aid in testing the roles of matter in Western cultural discourses. These examinations are based upon the ways in which both offerings and fetishes are relational, i.e. they both have the ability to transform, mediate, seal contracts and challenge modern concepts of value. Fetishes can be created from many things such as materials of economic value such as 'fetish gold' or they can be things of animal tails, bone, shell, or *whatever else might be present in the moment of their own creation*. The fetish is a collaborative project. It is a contract that serves to seal agreements (the consequences of which are punishment

by the fetish if agreements are broken). Fetishes can be bits of wood, bibles, beads, feathers and bones. A fetish might serve its creator in a similar way to how the Bible serves its adherents for the swearing of oaths in a court of law. Like Catholic rosary beads and amulets, the whole of the components of the fetish can be considered talismanic. It can offer protection. Like offerings (and specifically the images and cast moldings of limbs found in the form of *ex votos* in the shrine of Alcala), it can also be an extension of the fetishist. Like statues of the Goddess or Mary, sometimes the fetish is dressed, fed, or housed. The fetish is sometimes treated as a god, and destroyed by the people who created it. The fetish exists under negotiated terms. Its status is always in a state of flux. It is not fixed. As with the roles of offerings, subjects and objects cohere with the fetish. It is the beginning and end of devotion and it has the power to traverse worlds and boundaries, to heal, to protect, to make magic, to punish, and to bind agreements. Offerings, like the fetish, are relational tools and the roles of offerings are not all together different from those of the fetish as described by Graeber, Pietz and Johnson.

Can the roles and materiality of religious offerings be considered 'fetishistic'? Yes. Once divorced from the 'problem of the fetish', the 'problem of materiality' and the commonly accepted dualities discussed throughout this thesis, offerings can be considered fetishistic. This assertion is best illustrated when working from the previously mentioned etymology of the word which is, 'that which is made' (Johnson, 2000: 229) and understand that the fetish is thing of creative relational engagement whose role is ever changing. This can be exemplified through looking again at the roles of sentimental objects. Johnson says,

In sum, if one means of reclaiming the fetish is tracing its etymology and usage, the other is by changing its arrow of valuation from denoting that which is Other to that which is right under our noses. That is to say, there may be social/cultural phenomena that are

most usefully understood under the rubric of the fetish—phenomena whose primary criterion is their materiality and condensed signification. Obvious examples named above include a wedding ring or a photo of the beloved (2000: 252).

Using Johnson's example of a wedding ring or a photo of a loved one, the phenomena of the giving of offerings such as family heirlooms can now be considered. Building on this chapter's discussion of sentimental value, objects such as these are fetishized in that they are also extensions of their givers. The gold jewelry that was melted down to go into the crowns of Our Lady and the Virgin of Alcala will, for example, hold the essences of those who had previously wore the gold that was melted down. Those essences may only be recognizable to those family members of the person who donated the rings and other jewelry, or those essences might forever be present in the crowns. It is not possible to know for certain. Sentimental/fetishistic value does not, however, stop with jewelry. As mentioned before, animal bones, earrings, carved pieces of wood, feathers, locks of hair, cloth, bandages, war medals, cigarettes, dummies, plasters, sea shells, stones, ribbons, corn dollies, pictures, necklaces, flowers, little statues, bracelets, and all the personally relational materials used in acts of devotion in these settings are found in the temple and the shrine. The ways in which these things are valued, their purposes and their creative functions point to the similarities of those found within the discourse of the fetish.

In terms of creation, protocol and purpose, offerings and fetishes also sometimes differ. Unlike the fetish, the before mentioned aesthetic and protocol surrounding that which is considered acceptable to be left as offerings do not exist in the same way for the fetish. The fetish is diverse and spontaneous and can be made from the materials present in the moment of, for example, a contractual agreement between two or more human persons (a contract that the fetish witnesses and is capable of punishing parties who do not maintain their part in the

agreement). Although offerings can also be spontaneously 'picked up' in route to the temple or shrine, offerings are not as 'free' as fetishes. An example of this lies in the fact that the fetish is not limited to the aesthetics involved (especially the Goddess religiosity) in maintaining color coding and other material elements of the ritual year. The materiality associated with the ritual year strongly influences shrine and temple creativity and thus affects the roles and function of the offering when discussed using the rubric of the fetish. The creation of the fetish does not have religious/liturgical restrictions. Another difference between the creativity of offerings and the fetish is that devotees are influenced by that which they think the Virgin and Goddess will want them to bring to the temple. The 'desires' of the deities, whether divinely inspired, inspired by doctrinal and/or aesthetic protocol, or both, shape how offerings are created and ultimately what is given. So although offerings are contractual and sometimes created in moments of divine inspiration, unlike the fetish, offerings cannot be gods who punish if contracts or promises are broken. Statues, however, are a different story.

Like Mauss' (2006) idea of gifts, the fetish is contractually constructed in order to help build social relations between two human persons. Yet the kinds of contracts that are made in the Goddess Temple and the shrine of the Virgin take place between statue persons and human persons. It is an act of negotiation that depends on faith and belief. Offerings are often left before and/or after promises are made, and in some cases they testify to promises that have been kept. As demonstrated in the ethnographic accounts, promises are negotiations and contracts with the divine found in the example of words such as, 'If you do this for me, I will buy you a new roof for your shrine'. Here, offerings serve as contractual, mediating currency whereby the economy of gift giving is maintained and continued. This type of promise is conceptual instead of material, but it is current and contractual just the same. So what are the dynamics that take place

when statues of the Goddess and Virgin are contracted for purposes of healing? Promises made in the form of offerings in return for healing are a commonality found in each case study. The *Santero* says about the Virgin in cases of healing, 'If she does not want it to happen, it will not happen'. Further studies might address what happens when the Virgin or the Goddess does not fulfill a promise. This might put an end to the promise of exchange and reciprocity. Might the devotee who enters into their bargain with the deity/saint retract their offering, pledge or promise? This is a question leads me to the next phase of this chapter: power relations. Yet *ex votos* line the walls of the shrine. Like the closing of an open ended circuit, paintings are commissioned for promises that have been 'completed' as they say in Spain. This attribution of absolute power to the Virgin can be likened to Pels 'spirit of matter' where power is not thought to be transcendent, but inherent in the statue, both despite and in congruence with, doctrinal implications. So whereas the materials used and the ways in which they are valued in the creation of the fetish are often similar to that of offerings, the roles that statues play are sometimes more fetishistic than those of offerings.

### *Power Relations and Perspectives*

Surveying the types of relationships that devotees have with the statues (and vice versa) leads to explorations into the power relations that take place between the two, an issue that both engages and challenges Maussian (2006) and other generally accepted ideas of gift exchange and reciprocity where, bound by social obligation, gifts are given between human persons who seek reciprocal ends. In shrines and temples, there is a form of gift exchange that, like Strathern found in Melanesia, creates long lasting relations with the divine. However, applying Mauss' 'gift' to the religiosities that surround the Virgin and the Goddess is not an easy task. The difficulty encountered here is that the statue persons and human persons involved in gift exchange have

different 'corporeal' perspectives, or points of view located within their bodies (Viveiros de Castro, 2004a). It is, however, through surveying this phenomenon of giving objects coded as offerings to other objects (statues) that we know that we are dealing with Western animist relationality.

How this works in more detail will now be examined. There is a type of gift giving and reciprocity that takes place at the altars of the Goddess and the Virgin, but it is not the type of gift exchange or reciprocity discussed by Mauss (2006: 13) where gifts are social representatives being given and received by two human-person participants who share law, or a set of socially agreed norms. In these contexts, objects are given to objects and the giver is the human agent. Devotees 'perform' before statues and make offerings/give gifts. How, then, are these gifts received? How are they accepted, if at all? The Virgin and the Goddess share culture with their devotees, but can statue persons and human persons share etiquette of gift exchange? It was toward the end of my thesis that I began to stumble upon the significance of these questions, hence, further studies will need to address these questions in greater detail, and more. In the meantime, offerings are here considered using the discourse of the fetish. Graeber argues that the 'fetish' was born out of pure improvisation between peoples (in this case human persons and statue persons) who did not understand one another yet who had desires regarding what they wanted to 'get' from the world and from each other. Graeber writes,

This is what one might expect in a world of almost constant social creativity; in which few arrangements were fixed and permanent, and, even more, where there was little feeling that they really should be fixed and permanent; in which, in short, people were

indeed in a constant process of imagining new social arrangements and then trying to bring them into being (2005: 27).

Gifts serve as relational tools and exchange currency that ensures the fulfillment of the concerns (worldly and other than worldly) of those who give and receive them. Persons (human and other than human) are brought together under those desires.

In terms of reciprocity and exchange, statues must give something back. In the case studies discussed here, my informants say that they do. The Goddess and the Virgin are said to grant wishes, protect, and cure illnesses and infertility. These statues/deities can be negotiated with to make these things happen. Statues are said to listen, empathize, and they can, depending on the encounter, play either intercessory roles to greater supernatural powers, be immanently powerful, or both. They must do this if they are to maintain their perspectives of power, i.e. their divine, royal status and ties with devotees.

Mauss' (2006) research among the Maori found that the giving of gifts pivots on factors of human exchange where objects can be enchanted by the giver, be poisonous, magical, or have good or bad will (2006: 13). Human persons do not usually have supernatural powers, but statues of the divine feminine do (or else they are said to). This does not denote equality. If the giving of gifts, according to Mauss (2006: 18), is about achieving balance through obligation and reciprocation, then statue devotion to the Virgin and the Goddess do not quite fit into this equation. Gifts are, however, given nonetheless. Like the fetish, the power of the Goddess and the Virgin is thought to be able to punish, to destroy enemies, and protect devotees and entire parishes from disasters. In this way, statues have more power than devotees. Gift giving to statues also maintains the peace with statues whose power can be so unpredictable and unruly that offerings must be made to satisfy that whose power is, in actuality, other and therefore



unknowable and potentially dangerous. Devotees can, however, have power over the Virgin and the Goddess, too. For example, should the statues stop fulfilling their roles and duties, those who maintain their positions (through maintenance and belief) could potentially rebel. Guardians and care takers could simply let the statues fall into ruin in terms of restorative processes, or in the case of the Goddess, they could be left to decompose instead of being ceremonially burned in a way that is suitable to divine royalty. So when Graeber (2005: 411) writes of social creativity in terms of statues that we create and then fall down and worship, perhaps this is better understood as a *creative tension* between persons who are not and cannot be social in the same way, but who are mutually dependent upon one another and share culture in terms of religion.

### *Mediation*

As a final but by no means lesser point to the thesis, the creative tension that exists between devotees and statues can be momentarily reconciled through both the offerings themselves and the act of giving offerings. Viveiros de Castro says,

The exchange model of action supposes that the other of the subject is another subject, not an object; and this, of course, is what perspectivism is all about subjectification (2004a: 477).

Whereas the act of giving offerings is transformational for both human persons and statue persons, i.e. both become subjects in moments of active relating, despite what the differences in perspective or power might be, offerings are mediators who resolve power conflicts and tensions between two different 'bodies' who have different capabilities. Just as Bourdieu (1997: 231) is concerned with what happens in exchange situations in the stages that pass between giver and

receiver, I am concerned with the transformational process that occurs when offerings are in route to the divine. Building on Pels' idea that the fetish refers to objects of 'abnormal traffic' (1998: 94), offerings also frequent the relational zone and the pathways of magic, mysticism, the so called irrational, and the religious. They have a tool-like use value that renders them capable of conveying messages to statues who are perceived by devotees to a) have supernatural powers and influence and who b) sit on the frontier between this world and beyond. Mediation must occur in these moments to build bridges between two types of persons, i.e. human persons and object persons. Offerings also mediate between Western concepts of value, i.e. economic and non-economic. Here, everyday, or 'secondary' relational objects can be transformed or converted into gifts and/or relational tools (primary relational things), and their relational status changes depending on the intentionality of the giver or the ontological possibilities contained by the object. This is not to say, however, that offerings are not capable of supporting their own discourses and intentionality. Like Harvey's discussion of stones (2005b: 36), offerings are just as capable of personhood as any other object, plant, animal or human depending on relational engagement and further, the co-creative, co-relational process of exchange that occurs between devotees and statues. These so-called objects are far from normal, common commodities, but they can have their humble origins there, too.

### *Conclusion to Chapter 7*

With the help of the discourse of the fetish, this chapter has established that in both the Goddess Temple and the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala, offerings both encompass and go beyond Western concepts of value while simultaneously performing the role of mediators between gift giver and

receiver, i.e. human persons and object persons. It is through these exchanges that relationships are facilitated and maintained and how power relations are kept in balance between statues and devotees. The transformational roles of offerings given in shrine and temple settings reflect the undercurrent of the nature of the culture of capital, i.e. that objects and subjects can seldom be separated, or to use Marx's analogy, *alienated* from one another. Therefore the roles that offerings play are demonstrative of roles that objects play in Western culture. Further the flexibility of the relational nature of offerings points toward the flexibility that accompanies the uniqueness of animist relational encounters and the ontologies that consequently emerge as a result.

### *Conclusion*

From time spent at the shrine of the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess Temple, with their devotees, and with the statues themselves, using a relational methodological approach, I have found that the 'things', the materiality, discussed in this thesis have proved to go far beyond any categorical distinction that theorists from any discipline can easily make. The statues of the Virgin and the Goddess play subjective roles towards their devotees that defy both the idea of religious representation and the types of agency that might be 'attributed' to objects by material cultural theorists. They are, in fact, engaged as subjects of devotion instead of objects of devotion, and this is evidenced in the relationships that devotees have with them, i.e. how they are treated, addressed, negotiated with and given gifts. It has been through 'relationships' that the animate qualities of statues have come to light.

The questions raised from observing the relationships that take place with the statues discussed in this thesis have resulted in two outcomes. First, a concept of relationality has been created that is capable of addressing the volatile engagement that takes place in the shrine and temple. Using both animist and fetish relational discourses, this is based on the idea that objects and subjects bring each other into co-inspired, mutually responsive, deliberate forms of being during fully inter-personal moments of active relating. Fetishist relationality refers to what happens when a statue is related to as if it were power inherent in matter, while animist relationality refers to the overall relational personhood of so called objects. Second, through the use of Mauss' gift (2006), the roles of offerings have also been tested and found to be a major component in both exemplifying and communicating relationships with the Virgin and the Goddess. The fetish is engaged further as a lens through which to examine the value and

materiality of offerings and their transformative potentialities within the modalities of devotion that take place in 'Western' religiosities such as vernacular Catholicism and Goddess Paganism in England and Spain. My research has found that the concept of relationality can be applied to things generally in Western culture, yet it is through the roles of religious objects that their potentialities are tested to their full relational capacities.

### *Statues*

The role of relationality is not, however, the same as that of Viveiros de Castro's ontological perspectivism, Harvey's animism, or Scott's ontological emergence. These theories have served as ways in which the dynamic relationality of objects can be tested. Relationality is an aspect of Harvey's (2005b) animism which suggest that animals, objects and other persons are animated when they are in relationship with another person (as indicated by treatment and behavior toward that person). Although the concept of relationality can be applied across a broad cultural spectrum and to many types of objects, here it has been radicalized in a) its application to the statue devotion that takes place in 'the West', specifically, England and Spain; and b) because it is *only in moments* of active relating that statue persons come into being. Dependent on what a devotee brings to the encounter in terms of epistemology, this form of radicalized animist relationality is so relational that Tylor's animism (1913 [1871]) might also be useful to account for that which takes place in momentary relationships with statues. Relationality is such that it allows statues to contain 'spirits', be embodied with divine presences, be representative of a divine presence, or be inert matter. Scott's (2006) idea of ontological emergence describes that which occurs in moments of relational engagement with things of nature such as trees and different animals. Yet in addition to simultaneity, I am emphasizing that relational encounters

with statues are deliberate, intentional and informed by the modalities that constitute the Goddess Paganism and vernacular Catholicism.

Drawing on Viveiros de Castro's (2004a) ontological perspectivism where different worlds are known through corporeally diverse points of view, the bodily perspectives of statues have been taken into consideration. Statues of the Virgin and the Goddess do not have 'souls' in the ways that animals or humans do, nor the centrality of a spiritual unity to which they belong and are diversified through their bodily differences. Their 'bodies' are, like the bodies of other persons, alive because their material properties form part of the meshwork (Ingold, 2011: 28). Further, relationality is not a departure from Ingold's theory of meshwork, but an addition which, based on religious events in context, contributes an active relational dynamic to this theory. This means that the statues of the Virgin and the Goddess *and* their material components (cedar and willow) can be recognized as being a part of a living, fluid, relational schema because they form part of the whole, i.e. that which is in constant relationship with all that is, and that is always in process of being and becoming.

### *Similarities/differences*

The Virgin and the Goddess have much in common in terms of the performances, relationships, aesthetics, and the economies of offerings that take place in relation to them. Despite the cultural and religious differences found between Glastonbury Goddess Pagans and Andalusian Spanish Catholics, similarities are seen in how materiality is related to, treated and addressed in each case study. These include similarities and in some cases, exact equivalence, in modes and explanations for petitioning the divine, altar arrangements, modes of facilitating, continuing, and reciprocating relationships, statue/figure display and veneration, and the types of offerings made.

Further, the centrality of *healing* found in each religiosity indicates similarities in terms of expectations, reliance, interdependence, and within relationships. The Virgin and the Goddess differ in terms of the properties found in their statue bodies and within their religious contexts. The gifts offered to each statue walk both different and similar paths. They are similar in that they range in materials used, are often crude, sometimes economically viable, and always relationally capable of delivering the intentionality of the devotee. Their aesthetic can inspire and inform, and they have the power to further creative modes of devotion, or be none of these things. They are different because each thing that becomes an offering is influenced by the particularities of each religiosity.

### *Display*

Relationality is affected not only by the images, statues and other forms of materiality that are on display in both the shrine and the temple of the Virgin and the Goddess, but the manner in which they are displayed and arranged. Positioning of the Virgin of Alcala makes her physically accessible to her devotees. Because devotees can go beneath her mantle and have private, intimate moments alone with her, her relational status is different from that of the Goddess. In this case, because of the rough nature of the material and the ways in which they are displayed, statues of the Goddess receive comparatively little affection. Further the objects on display in the temple and the shrine 'work like a language' (Hall, 2003: 8) that transmits cues and messages capable of inspiring further modes of devotion and playing roles in relational encounters with devotees, even if those roles are indirect. My research demonstrates that the ways in which the materiality found in the temple and the shrine (offerings, colours, statues) are arranged/displayed serve as setting upon which devotees 'come on stage' and perform their relational encounters.

### *Offerings*

Mauss' (2006) gift has played a significant role in understanding the value of objects as gifts as they are given to statues in negotiation and exchange situations. Offerings are commodities as well as spiritual, magical, transformative, 'abnormal traffic' discussed by Pels (1998). Due to the materiality of the offerings found in the shrine of the Virgin and the temple of the Goddess, this thesis re-interrogated the fetish which showed that its untranscended materiality served as a useful way in which to re-imagine the roles of both statues and offerings, especially in terms of sentimental offerings.

Value has played a large role in offerings, how they are given. Offerings to the Goddess and the Virgin have been found to be just as transformative and mediating as the roles of statues but in ways that particularly address the relational roles of matter, value and exchange within the Western economic culture of capital. This is why monetary offerings and things of gold and silver are given an important note. The silver and gold that adorn the Virgin (her jewelry, her silver *templete*, her gold crown), for example, are economically the 'best' that can be given to her. No other metals in Western discourse have the qualities and value that gold and silver have. The use of these precious metals further reflects the value put on the relationships that devotees have with her. This conclusion further expands on concepts of value which, apart from monetary offerings that connect the giver with the State, circumscribes the Western normative concepts of value which are reflected by the materials commonly used in devotion (acorns, locks of hair, gold, oak, baby dummies and willow). Objects/offerings of sentimental value exemplify the fact that offerings are relational in their own way – i.e. a way which differs from the relationality of statues. Like the diversity found in their compositions, offerings exemplify relational intentionality and serve as bargaining tools with the divine.



Further explorations in the gift exchange that takes place between statues of the Virgin and the Goddess and devotees resulted in a discussion about the power relations that take place between the two. Statues and devotees do not share personhood. They are persons in different ways. Therefore the 'rules' are different from when human persons (who, at a local level, share law and culturally accepted ways of gift giving and reciprocity) enter into exchange situations with one another. Although statues are relationally capable of being more powerful than devotees (i.e. they have access to supernatural power) devotees also have power over statues in terms of their care, restoration and regeneration. This has resulted in a creative tension where both statues and devotees maintain one another's statuses, which leads to further relational encounters.

*Expanded on dualisms*

This research has found that the idea of representation which so commonly reflects the way in which religious images and statues are perceived is not adequate to account for that which occurs in lived context. Devotees do not consistently treat, refer to, or address the statues that stand before them as 'representations', although this sometimes occurs, too. They are engaged as if they are 'subjects' instead of objects. As Georgina said, the willow figures of the Goddess at the temple 'embody' the Goddess, she is within and without. The Goddess has been afforded the possibility to be in more than one place at a time. The Virgin of Alcala is spoken to, employed and treated like a sacred, living woman. When asked if she is 'alive' Yolanda said 'Yes and no. The statue is a statue', but she continued, 'She's the Virgin, our Lady'. There is a kind of conflict involved when surveying statue devotion due to the fact that religious objects (willow branches, cedar wood, altar objects and their arrangements) are spoken to, treated respectfully, given greater or lesser importance, and are at the center of cults of admiration and devotion. Yet there is always the moment of pause when a Spanish or English devotee of a so called object is asked

if their Goddess or Virgin is 'really' the deity she is meant to represent. This is because devotees are not only devotees, but are also self-consciously modern Europeans who are aware, as Gell (1998: 122) pointed out, that the statue is a statue. For this reason the terms 'embodiment' and 'representation' have been employed as two terms which indicate the presence of two further relational possibilities which are dependent upon the relational encounter in question.

Embodiment and representation are, after all, relational in and of themselves and are treated as non fixed, fluid terms which allow for a myriad of possibilities to occur. Instead of a rejection of dualities, the contribution that thesis offers to the modernity debate is that dualisms can be expanded upon to include relational possibilities. This is possible because relationality, in its active flexibility as a critical category works in several different non exclusive ways.

### *Exaggerations*

Relationality has been proposed as a theoretical tool that can be applied to objects across a broad spectrum of cultures and contexts. As seen in the contexts of the Virgin of Alcala and the Goddess, 'things' are not always interacted with as if they are the material against which we define ourselves as 'modern' humans. Yet due to their relational nature, re-thinking statue and object engagement as exemplified at the shrines of the Virgin of Alcala and the Goddess Temple provides another dimension to the way in which 'things' are theorized within in the materiality debate. Material cultural studies can therefore benefit from understanding that which happens in the cases of the Goddess and the Virgin and how these 'objects' take on lives of their own, even if momentarily. The answer to the question of whether or not objects are capable of perpetuating/containing their own discourses and ontological possibilities does not lie in 'relationships', but in 'relating'. Hence, the case is not whether or not objects have agency – the

ways that agency is understood in material culture studies does not address its full relational capacity. The point is that agency, too, is relational.

In terms of implications for the study of religions specifically, animist relationality also aids in understanding religion as it is lived, that is in its myriad vernacular, unique forms that shift and change with every encounter and that are continually in process of being, and becoming. This argument can potentially lead to a paradigmatic shift in the ways in which religion and things are understood that adds another, third dimension to religious polemics that have been taking place for centuries. In other words, instead of the religious constructs which perpetuate the sacred and the profane, immanence and transcendence, spirit and matter, relationality can be seen as a bridge which unites these dualisms, placing religious objects and performance on a generative continuum instead of at odds. Further, the case studies provide evidence enough to suggest that the concept of relationality can be applied to many, of not all, cases of statue devotion – whether ‘Western’ or not. The study of religious materiality can thus be greatly enhanced by the relational stances taken by theorists such as Latour (1993, 2005), Viveiros de Castro (2000, 2004a), Miller (2005), Harvey (2005b), Scott (2006), Pels (1998, 2008) and Ingold (2011).

In terms of ‘Western’ objects generally, they are also relational, but their roles differ to those of religious objects. Still yet the transformative potentiality is there with cars, rug, and lamps, even if the likelihood is not. If someone were to pick up a kettle, as Harvey suggests, and relate to it as “Thou rather than an “it” (2005b: 11) and treat it in a way that is special or differs from other objects, then it, too has become a subject of encounter. The ways in which devotees engage Western religious objects such as the Virgin and the Goddess exemplify *exaggerations* of the ways which materiality can potentially work generally.

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